

Portfolio Note: This is a review for a travel bag – the Osprey Transporter 40 -- targeting budget and lightweight travelers who might be looking for a bag to help them carry essential components in small bags. Even most wheeled luggage ends up under the plane, so I set out to find a bag that not only met the TSA flight requirements but could also double as a carry-on without taking up the “personal item” restriction that most airlines allow.

The review style is conversational and casual but could easily be changed to something more formalized. I chose the What Works / What Doesn't format as a way to summarize the acquisition and testing steps.

Review: Osprey Transporter 40



Bags are my preferred way to travel. Because I prefer to travel light, I don't really “do” checked luggage. There's always the worry that a checked bag won't reach its destination, especially in the event of a cancelled flight or an unexpected plane change. Plus, it's more expensive.

Researching

Until recently, I used a beat up, worn out Field and Stream hiking backpack that I picked up from a local sporting goods chain years ago. I had a love-hate relationship with that bag. It got the job done, but it was clear that I was using it in a way counter to its basic design. Plus, the airport folks always gave me the wary eye because “technically” it wasn’t supposed to go in the overhead bin, and I never check bags on the jetway either.

So, when I started researching replacement bags, I had a good idea of the qualities I was looking for.

I wanted:

- Something lightweight and portable that could fit in the overhead bin on an airplane.
- Something with an open design philosophy so I could pack the way I wanted.
- Something durable that wouldn’t tear or rip just because I was a little rough with it.
- Something versatile enough to be handled in a variety of different ways.

I researched under those four major checkpoints, and I looked at huge selection of bags. The most frustrating thing about most of the potentials I looked at were the absurd number of pockets that divided the open space. It’s not space if you can’t utilize it in the way you want, right?

Enter: The Osprey Transporter Series. (Oooh Ahhh!)

In a nutshell, it’s a duffle bag with straps that can be separated to make the entire bag a backpack. Points for versatility there.

The only question was how it would fare when I actually put it to the test.

The Field Test

For a recent trip to Colorado, I packed the Osprey with:

- three full changes of clothes, including two shirts per outfit (tee and button-down) and heavy jeans.
- basic toiletries
- my standard daily carry (wallets, flashlights, etc.)
- an 11” Macbook Air and all appropriate chargers and cables

- a six-inch pack of origami paper (travel hobby)

This is actually overpacking for me. Were this a longer trip and under different circumstances, I'd have packed to leave a little extra space for souvenirs. That's not to say that the fit wasn't roomy. I had enough space to bring back a coffee mug for a friend and a couple of other travel trinkets, even with what I carried.

At the airport, I experienced no problems. One of the major benefits to the Transporter 40 is that it has two sets of side pockets. One is on the inside of the main compartment, which is where I put all the stuff that the TSA doesn't care about. The second is an external pocket, which zips seamlessly into the side. I put liquids and the TSA red flag items there so that I can get them out easily.

Above the main packing area, there is a small zippered compartment where I stowed the origami paper and the laptop. While it's not padded down heavily, it's my preferred area for electronics because it sits against my back when I use the duffel as a backpack and it's on top of everything else if I set the Transporter 40 down.

Hauling the pack around through the airport wasn't a problem. I traveled with a messenger bag, which had all of my photography gear. I would strap the messenger bag over my shoulder, then use weight of the Osprey to lock it in place. Worked like a charm.

Boarding at the gate was the real test. I get nervous when I try new bags, because if something goes wrong, I might end up having to throw my gear under the plane, which I don't want to do. Happily, the Osprey fit inside the overhead bin on even the smallest plane I took with room to spare.

Over the course of my trip, I lived out of the Osprey. I didn't unpack everything and toss it off to the side. When traveling, I like to know that everything is in its proper place. Again, the Osprey excelled here.

Even knowing the versatility of the bag, I was surprised at how convenient it was to switch between carrying the duffel by the handles and using it as a backpack. I'd typically wear it on my back to a destination, and then use the duffel handles for short relocations or narrow passages (walking down the aisle of the plane, for example).

Overall, the Transporter 40 performed beautifully.

What Works

My experience with the Transporter 40 so far has some pretty great positives:

- The ripstop exterior gives a durable, rugged feel. I never felt like the Transporter 40 was in any danger of ripping or tearing from being mishandled.
- Pockets built into the frame of the and placed discreetly into the right places.
- Spacious, but portable.
- Versatile interchangeability between a backpack and a duffle.

What Doesn't

So, what were the downsides? As far as I can tell, there are two notable downsides and one minor flaw:

- The unpacking process is a little frustrating. The Transporter 40 comes in a bag about the size of a business envelope. In order to unpack it, you have to flip it inside out, which results in this cocoon-to-butterfly transformation that reveals the full-sized Transporter 40. I had to Google it to figure out how to open it. In theory, it can be repacked, but I don't have the patience to try it.
- The padded zipping around the top flap is a little loose. I was always worried about the exterior zipper catching padding as I opened it. It hasn't happened, but I'm extra cautious about opening / sealing the bag.
- The top pocket where I kept my laptop worked well for me, but a larger laptop probably wouldn't fit as easily. I put mine in long-ways, then turned it inside the pocket to pack it in. This is no problem for my little 11-inch model, but I couldn't see a larger machine going there. I think this pocket would be more useful if the opening was a bit larger.

The Verdict

Realistically, the Transporter 40 will be my travel bag for the foreseeable future. It's a little less space on paper than my previous bag (a 55L), but it feels like much more space because of how the compartments are arranged.

For extremely long excursions, I might prefer a bag with a frame to help support the weight, but for short trips or trips where I can pack light, the Transporter 40 is more than enough for a savvy budget traveler.