

GOTTA HAVE GEAR

SCOUT CHEST PACK FROM SG FIELDCORE | Review by Brian Clark

Believe it or not, the fly fishing carry niche is one of the deepest eddies in the sport. I've been working my way through various vests and packs and slings for 50ish years now, and publishing formal reviews for a decade, and it seems like I'm never satisfied. I'm sure that I rank among the community's most faithless and disloyal bag magpies. After eliminating a few solutions that just didn't work at all, for better and worse, I've ended up rotating through a number of different "right" answers, and they're highly situational and subjective. I've got a warmwater kit for Colorado's Front Range, and a different one that lives in my trunk down south, and yet another travel bag for after-hours carping while on business trips. There's a small trout kit for rivers I know well, a big one for trout rivers where I'm just guessing, one for stillwaters, another for steelhead swing trips, plus kits for my son, plus a boat bag for chasing inshore species in the marsh saltwater on the skiff, a smaller one for jumping on other people's boats, separate packs for flats trips . . .

Honestly, it's a giant muddle — worse than a muddle, it's a massive mess. But it keeps me off the streets.

Occasionally a bag comes along that sticks in my rotation for some time, and the latest to punch enough of the right buttons is the Scout Chest Rig from SG Fieldcore, a young company based in the Salt Lake City metropolitan area. In sharp contrast to specialized bags with integrated compartments for particular items, SG Fieldcore's designs are more like open source platforms. Their same harness works for both the Scout and its bigger sibling, the Frontier Chest Rig, and their sling and belt systems are likewise interchangeable. Almost every surface area inside and out can function as an attachment point, either with MOLLE / PALS strips or VELCRO®. That leaves you free to customize and accessorize endlessly — perfect for somebody like me who's constantly tinkering and actively switching between different applications.

Although it's possible to mix in any MOLLE or Velcro-equipped gear, these folks have worked up a number of compatible accessories for fly fishing that are noteworthy, as well as some for turkey hunting and first aid. The foam fly patch and floatant holders are solid, but I'm particularly fond of their tippet holders. They're simple but versatile,

accommodating anything from a couple spools to a whole stack — or two stacks, as shown here. I also really like their "magnet sock" idea for tool attachment; these powerful Velcro-coated rare-earth magnet strips can be placed almost anywhere inside the pack, allowing you to make ferrous tools stick to the pack like magic.

Their extra rod holder also deserves accolades — it's one of my favorites across any bag. I'm very much that idiot who shows up with three or even four rods rigged, and hitherto I've always leaned on belt-mounted extra rod holders. Having the rod right up top, leaned against a shoulder, and, critically, within my peripheral vision — that's a great move. It's fast and easy to mount and dismount, and you always know exactly where your rod tip is since it's on your shoulder instead of your waist. With many of the belt-mounted solutions, you're frequently grappling with the rod handle and hoping the rod tip isn't finding the ground.

Other accessories include a bear spray caddy, fly puck holder, wader connections, and much more.

At first I thought maybe I'd miss having padding in the straps, but they're soft and wide enough that they don't cut into my shoulders, and they're extremely lightweight. They're making me rethink the wisdom of excessive padding, wondering whether that's a waste of precious ounces.

There are several ways to attach a net, but I've taken to wearing a waist belt with an integrated net holder. That approach provides back support, lets me carry a bigger net, avoids dangling accessories, and doubles as a safety wading belt when I'm wearing waders. I only had to make minor adjustments to the side straps to go from wearing the Scout over waders to running them over just a hoodie.

It's a small thing, but details matter: they've provided a handle for top carry. That's wonderful. It feels like so many designers fixate on how the bag will be worn and forget that often we're just carrying the bag from the house to the truck, truck to boat, etc. When I've got an armload of stuff, it drives me nuts when I have to bundle up a bag instead of simply grabbing the top handle. Designers, take note!

The Scout isn't a particularly big bag, but for me it's just about what I want in a chest pack. For trout outings, I can comfortably slip two or three slim fly boxes into the main



compartment along with my phone and bottles of floatant and dry shake, each secured in its own Velcro-attached caddy. Nippers go on the outside but stick to those internally mounted magnet socks. I'm running two stacks of tippet on the front, and it's hands-down the most accessible tippet storage system I've ever used.

When I switch to warmwater, I swap out one tippet stack and replace the trout fly boxes with a slim box of carp flies and a thick box of bass streamers and poppers. I yank the floatant bottles and enjoy running a bit lighter.

The build quality is top-shelf. Great materials, solid stitching, clean lines, clever design. The combination of

MOLLE attachment points and copious Velcro means endless adaptability. As opposed to designs which are intended for use in a particular way, these bags put all that power into your hands. They've provided all the tools and accessories and means of attachment — now it's up to the user to figure out a system that works. Like I said, it keeps me off the streets.

MSRP US\$229 for the Scout Chest Rig, Core System
MSRP US\$249 for the larger Frontier Chest Rig
Accessories sold separately
Website: sgfieldcore.com/collections/chest-packs/products/scout-chest-rig-core-system