

Vanguard Alta Sky 68

For those wanting their long lens and camera always at the ready, this could be the perfect solution

WITH CANON, FUJIFILM, Nikon and Olympus recently announcing high-spec super telephoto lenses – and optics like Sony’s 200-600mm f/5.6-6.3 popular – the need for cool, yet practical carrying solutions for long lens outfits is greater than ever.

Vanguard already has the Alta Sky 66 in its range – a slim and tall backpack that can swallow a 600mm f/4 fitted to a pro DSLR body, with space for more lenses.

Sensing an opportunity, Vanguard has added the Alta Sky 68 to the collection. This new backpack offers a similar height to the 66, so it can take a 600mm f/4 or even some 800mm f/5.6 primes attached to a camera, but it’s much broader. There’s greater capacity for more kit or personal items.

If you’re thinking about using this bag as hand luggage for air travel, check size and weight guidelines with the flight provider. The length limit for most airlines is currently 56cm or less, but the Alta Sky 68 is 59.5cm. That’s not an option, on paper at least.

Alta Sky 68 is specifically designed for long-lens-toting action and nature shooters, but will also appeal to photographers wanting to lug around a serious amount of imaging kit safely. In this day and age, that might include LED lights, mics, a drone or battery studio flash, as well as the essentials. In other words, the Alta 68 could be the ultimate carrying and working backpack.

I tested the Alta Sky 68 on a recent multi-base staycation, where

“I TOOK THE KITCHEN SINK APPROACH TO MY PACKING”



MAKE YOUR MOVE The height of the shoulder straps on the bag is quickly adjustable for greater comfort. The hand strap is on the thin side – and unpadded, too



SNUG AS A BUG The 3D padded rear, waist belt and adjustable shoulder and sternum straps make carrying a heavy load as cosy as possible

the photo opportunities included birds, macro, street and landscape. I required a broad selection of kit.

I took the kitchen sink approach to packing, so the Alta Sky 68 proved perfect. It meant that, rather than fill a couple of smaller backpacks, I got everything into one bag.

You won’t be surprised that a fully brimming Alta 68 is a serious weight – and 2.8kg unladen. By the time I loaded the bag up for my trip, the bathroom scales revealed that it came in at 13kg – that was two bodies (full-frame and medium format), seven lenses, filters, laptop and a speedlight. This is substantial, but fine for a trip where I would be working reasonably close to the car, so I could take what I needed for that particular shoot, or simply carry the whole caboodle to and from hotel rooms. For urban work, I decanted what I needed to a smaller bag – the MindShift PhotoCross 13, also tested in this issue.

When I did have to carry the bag further afield, well-padded shoulder straps, coupled with an ergonomic, breathable 3D back and waist strap, all made it comfortable. The shoulder strap height can also be adjusted to suit different body shapes. After a little experimenting, M seemed the best option for me, and that seated the bag’s large, cushioned pad nicely on my back. Altering this is quickly done, so it’s simple enough to try the various alternatives.

There’s also a detachable shoulder strap on the side that makes for a good carrying handle. This was actually more comfortable than the unpadded top handle.



Gear access is via the top lid or from the back panel, which covers about two-thirds of the rear. If you have the long lens attached to the body, the bag happily stands upright on the ground, so you can pull the camera out from the top. In practice, if you do have a long lens mounted, this is the only way to get it out. A thick, cut-out divider can be used to hold the long lens in place, but this may be left out if you want speedier removal of the camera/lens.

In the top section, I placed one camera fitted with a standard zoom, in addition to one with a long lens, leaving me options when I spotted something to shoot. All other gear went in the main compartment. The bag comes with a good supply of dividers, and the bright-orange interior means kit is easily visible – with high protection levels.

The rear panel includes a padded pocket for laptops up to 16in, while a

zipped front pocket can take an 11in tablet. With more zipped pockets on the front, side and top of the bag, there’s plenty of choices for stowing accessories – and a tripod could be carried on the side or front. **WC**

SPECS

- › **Price** £259.99
- › **Volume** 36 litres
- › **Capacity** Pro DSLR, lenses up to 600mm (and some 800mm f/5.6), seven extra lenses
- › **Gear access** Top front and bottom rear
- › **Laptop/tablet** 16in laptop or 11in tablet
- › **Rain cover** Supplied
- › **Internal dimensions (wxhxd)** 34x58x17.5cm
- › **External dimensions (wxhxd)** 36x59.5x23cm
- › **Weight** 2.8kg
- › **Contact** vanguardworld.co.uk



FROM THE BACK The rear cover gives access to the main storage area. Here, you can see the front end of a Sigma 150-600mm Contemporary lens on a body. Get it out from the top flap

Verdict

Vanguard has filled a niche with the Alta Sky 68 backpack. It is not designed for everyone, nor will it suit every situation. But for photographers requiring a portable bag with high protection levels for their expensive long lenses – or those who demand an extensive shooting outfit – this is an impressive solution, and nicely priced.

PROS Prodigious capacity, adjustable shoulder strap height, high protection levels, feature-rich, good to use

CONS A padded, broader top hand strap would be nice