

Maxpedition Balthazar Bag

Being that we work in something of a strange industry that might have us in boardrooms one day, on factory floors the next, and dusty ranges thereafter, it's hard to find gear that fits all the various objects a decent journalist needs to carry around, but still works in the various environments we might encounter. Enter Maxpedition. A long-time favourite of the tactical crowd thanks to their incredibly strong Cordura construction, Maxpedition also makes a metric ton of products that are incredibly low profile; for every one of their be-MOLLE'd pouches and Gearslinger bags, there seems to be at least one low-profile satchel or pack that looks entirely unassuming. The Balthazar is one such bag, which makes it perfect for us, since it means we can go from one role to another without feeling ill-equipped.

Then again, given the size of the Balthazar bag, there isn't much you would be ill equipped to handle were it fully loaded.



A big bag, Maxpedition's Balthazar can carry 40L worth of stuff in three distinct compartments.

With 40 litres of capacity in three distinct pockets, the Balthazar can tackle everything from tablets to notebooks to full on camera rigs, and even have enough room left over for an overnight trip's worth of clothes. This thing is seriously huge. But we didn't get it just for the size. No, we got it because in addition to the size, the

Balthazar is very well constructed. We've never been big fans of bags that force you to adopt their storage system, with a plethora of specifically-sized pockets and pouches, and instead prefer basic and rugged bags that allow us to be more flexible with our storage. And the Balthazar is precisely like that.

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The subdivided side pocket's great for smaller, more frequently used items, and opens completely.

To start off, there's one giant compartment in the middle. Accessed via a big nylon (lockable) zipper that stretches around three full sides of the bag, the only sub-compartment contained within is a padded laptop sleeve with a single Velcro strap that can easily be undone without opening the bag completely, allowing for easy access to your electronics. Conversely, if you ever need something in a hurry, the full length zipper allows for the entire bag to be cracked in two like a suitcase, giving much better access than rummaging down to the bottom would. The next largest compartment rides on one side of the bag, and actually does feature a few mesh sub-compartments. Again, there's a full-length zipper that allows the whole pocket to flop open for the most access, while the mesh pockets make it possible to keep things squared away so you can grab them by just opening the top of the compartment. And finally, on the flip side, there's a slightly smaller pocket with a half-zipper allowing it to be opened along the top half but no further. As a result, this pocket's the least accessible and has a more limited capacity.

Speaking to the bag's construction, it's pretty typical of Maxpedition. If you're unfamiliar with their gear, it's very, very robust and features some of the heaviest weight Cordura you're liable to find. The upside of that is obviously extreme abrasion and wear resistance. Keep in mind this is a company known for making stuff you strap to the outside of a LAV in Afghanistan, so it's probably ample for the rigors of civilian life. There is a downside though. Due to the heavyweight nature of

the construction and the generally oversized hardware, these are not extremely light bags, and they do take some break-in.

We're quite pleased with our Balthazar, and suspect we'll remain so for quite a while to come. Being rugged enough to survive the worst we can throw at it without looking untoward in a more civilized setting, it's a great go-between bag that, by virtue of being simple and unassuming remains incredibly flexible in use.

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