

## FIELD TESTED



# Metolius Ultralight Master Cams

\$59.95-\$64.95 / METOLIUSCLIMBING.COM

**Ultralight is the new light**, and that puts the Ultralight Master Cams from Metolius at the forefront of hipness. These single-axle cams—the next generation of the Master Cams—are the lightest, both in physical weight and price, four-lobe SLCDs on the market. The 10 units in the series range from 0.34 to 3.05 inches, and a full set only weighs 26.5 ounces.

Compared to the original Master Cams, which Metolius is discontinuing, the Ultralights are 20 percent lighter. Across a double rack, that means the equivalent weight savings of a “12-ounce canned beverage of your choice,” according to Metolius. To cut the weight, Metolius made a number of changes, such as shrinking the sling down from 13mm to 11mm and ditching the thumb loop of the previous generation. The new Dyneema/nylon hybrid sling is threaded directly through the metal thumb piece.

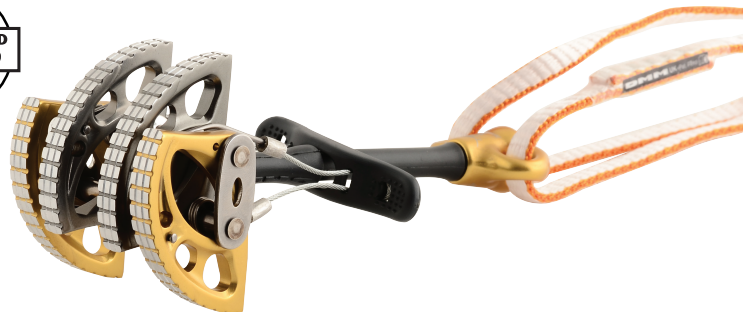
Without the old-model fixed thumb loop, the cams take up less space on your rack, and the sling can rotate through the thumb piece to avoid wear in any single spot, a double plus. I did find the new thumb piece a bit tricky for my fat thumb when I had to really extend to make a placement, but I'm getting used to it.

Also new in the Ultralights is their redesigned “shark fin” tooth pattern optimized for soft rock, according to Metolius. I took that as a challenge and went new routing with the set on soft Maroon conglomerate. Despite crumbling placements, grit and lichen, the smaller units felt bomber, even in shallow cracks. The two new larger sizes, 7 and 8, however, seemed too heavy—their big lobes seem to outsize their flexible stems.

Not new, but a favorite staple of the Ultralights is their narrow head width. A number 4 Master Cam, for example, is a full lobe narrow than most other equivalent size cams. The Ultralight's slim profile means they can fit in pin scars, creases and pockets that typically accept only TCUs, and it is this feature that gives Master Cams an edge over all other units.

The Ultralights are the only cams in this review that sport single axles. Having one axle lets the Ultralights achieve smaller sizes than dual-axle models—better for small cracks and weight savings. Of course having one axle gives the Master Cams less range per unit than dual-axle cams, meaning you need more cams to fill your rack for a given range. And so goes the decades-old debate: Is it better to carry more pieces of pro or fewer pieces that fit a wider range?

—Hayden Carpenter



# DMM Dragons

\$69.95-\$84.95 / DMMCLIMBING.COM

**Using the smooth walls** of the local Welsh slate quarries as a testing ground, DMM has produced confidence-inspiring cams that, they say, are better designed to perform in sub-optimum placements. It is the modifications to the cam lobes that distinguish these Dragons from those of previous generations.

First, DMM has widened just the ends of the cam lobes, increasing contact surface area without adding weight. Then there are the beast's teeth: each lobe is heavily grooved in a “TripleGrip” pattern. This, topped off with a raw aluminum finish, was experimentally proven, says DMM, to increase the friction coefficient and cam-holding power in outwardly flaring cracks.

The eight dual-axle Dragons have a great range for the set—spanning 0.51 to 4.49 inches—and a healthy degree of overlap between sizes. As such, as you enter moments of wild panic, the cam you grab is more likely to fit into the crack that you are slowly smearing out of. DMM also holds the baton for creating cams with the highest strength ratings (14kN for all cams except 00, which can sustain 10kN). My only word of caution would be to take care when setting these chaps in tight placements, as the new lobes bite pretty hard and can sometimes be reluctant to let go.

Another upgrade for the Dragons is the addition of texture on the hot-forged thumb press, which, in combination with the curved finger trigger, makes operation a breeze. By maintaining a thumb press rather than adopting a thumb loop, DMM has ensured that cam strength is not forfeited when the sling is extended. I don't find the thumb press harder to use than a thumb loop, although some people may find it takes getting used to, and it will reduce potential reach by an inch or so. Aid climbers will also note that always having to clip the sling will leave them a couple of inches lower in their stirrups. On the up side, the Dragons' 8mm extendable Dyneema sling—which is 10 inches at full extension—will reduce the number of quickdraws you need. The only issue with the sling is that if you don't pull the correct loop, it can tangle; not ideal while you're precariously balanced and pumping out, but avoidable if you're sharp about it.

The individual Dragons weigh a touch more than the comparable BD and Wild Country Ultralight offerings—particularly in the larger sizes—but are by no means cumbersome. The sturdiness, durability and reassuring bite of these cams on the rock are worth a few extra ounces.

—Harriet Ridley

### PROS

Super light.  
Narrow head width.  
Best price.  
Also come in offset version.

### CONS

Small cam range.  
Largest sizes are top heavy.  
**BEST FOR**  
Tips to hands.

### PROS

Excellent grip and reduced walking.  
Extendable sling.  
Good range of sizes and size overlap.

### CONS

Thumb press may take some getting used to and not the best for aid climbing.  
Easier to get stuck in tight placements.  
**BEST FOR**  
All-around heavy-duty use.

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## Black Diamond Camalot Ultralights

\$89.95-\$129.95 / BLACKDIAMONDEQUIPMENT.COM

No more dieting to reach sending weight—we can just lighten our racks. The geometry of the Black Diamond's Ultralights is almost exactly the same as that of the much-loved C4s in terms of stem rigidity, lobe size and head width, but there are some key changes that make the Ultralights, well, ultra light. BD has carved away any unnecessary metal on the lobes, replaced the traditional steel stem cable with a light and strong Dyneema cord, and even reduced the diameter of the trigger cables. The resulting set of seven cams has a combined weight of only 1.25 pounds—a 25 percent weight savings over the previous Camalots. Wowzers! Allow me to put this weight-saving potential into perspective: if you're racking up at Indian Creek for a marathon stint of perfect hands and take six each of #1s and #2s, you save nearly 14 ounces by using the Ultralights over the older Camalots. If you were climbing fists and baggy hands, this savings amounts to over a pound.

The result of the weight loss in the Ultralights is a reduction of the strength rating of each device by 2kN compared to original Camalots; however, unless you're an elephant taking a 30-foot lob on a #2, this simply isn't a problem. It was also speculated that the Ultralights would be less durable than other cams due to their Dyneema stem cord and thin trigger wires; however, after 50 pitches of use they don't look any worse for wear to me, and the only thing they could use would be a good oiling. In addition to being the lightest, each Ultralight has the largest individual range of any cams in this series—with the set covering 0.61 to 4.51 inches—and have good overlap with each other, furthering their ability to constitute a super lightweight and minimal rack. This is key when minimizing weight is paramount. The 14mm Dyneema slings are non-extendable, further helping to keep the weight down and the strength up, but if you're on meandering terrain then you'll need to carry draws to extend them.

In summary, the BD Ultralights are great for instantly improving your power-to-weight ratio, hauling up big walls and reducing load on long approaches or in the alpine; they are easy to identify with their standardized colors and easy to plug with their thumb loops and wide finger triggers. They do cost approximately \$20-\$40 more than equivalent cams from other brands, but if cutting weight is your goal, these babies are your pick.

—HR



## Wild Country Friends

\$64.95-\$89.95 / WILDCOUNTRY.COM

Of all the cams tested, the Wild Country Friends have undergone the most significant changes from previous generations, the obvious being the conversion to two axles and an updated color scheme that matches those of DMM and BD. In fact, Wild Country seems to have gone all out with their upgrades and made all the changes necessary to bring their Friends to the foreground.

First, the new dual-axle system produces a wider usable range than before, similar to those of DMM and BD. The individual cam ranges also display a healthy overlap. Second, like DMM, Wild Country has removed the anodizing on the lobes to improve friction and reduce walking, which I wholly agree it does, particularly in smooth

rock. Gone are the days of scrubbing your new cams against the parking lot asphalt to achieve optimum friction. The only potential drawback of this raw aluminum finish is that if the Friend is really squeezed into position, the increased friction can help the little guy to get stuck. Extra care is needed when removing tightly placed Friends, as an excess of wiggling in the wrong direction could lead to a lengthy spell spent sitting on the rope cursing and wielding a nut tool.

The Friends have thumb loops, perfect for you aid climbers out there reaching high for your next placement, and for those of us prone to grabbing cams in moments of stress. Wild Country has also made the 18mm sling extendable—it is seven inches when fully extended, but this equates to approximately nine inches if you include the

thumb loop. This is a real bonus for deep placements, and reducing rope drag without the need for extra quickdraws, thereby lightening your rack. Not that your rack will weigh too much, as Wild Country has also produced an extremely light set of Friends, with each device, apart from the #4, weighing less than an ounce more than the corresponding BD Ultralight.

The new Wild Country Friends are really well-rounded, very smooth to operate, and extremely ergonomic. My only wish is that the company had made a larger range of devices, as I would love to have these guys in very small or very large sizes. As it is, they only go down to 0.5 and up to #4.

—HR

### PROS

Updated color scheme to match other brands. Extendable sling. Excellent grip and reduced walking. Thumb loop.

### CONS

Easier to get stuck in tight placements. No Friends smaller than a 0.5 or larger than #4. BEST FOR All-around trad adventures.

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# Cams Compared

## Weights and Range

**So, which set do you need?** With the exception of the Metolius Master Cams, we're splitting hairs, as the units from Black Diamond, DMM and Wild Country are similar. As such, the subtleties of each model are the dealmakers or breakers. The chart below will help you visualize cam range and unit overlap. As you can see, the Black Diamond, DMM and Wild Country cams have the same color scheme and similar weights and ranges. The big difference is in the number of units per set. While the similarities between models may make for laborious decision-making in your local outdoor store, you can mix and match across brands without stress. Just think, you can have cams for all occasions, but still amalgamate them into one easy-to-use mega-rack if the need arises. The Metolius offering is a different beast, covering the smaller end of the cam scale—a valuable addition if you're a fiend for tips cracks or fiddly face climbing—and maxing out at just over three inches.

