

FIELD TESTED



Valandré Thor Neo \$1,050 Odin Neo \$899

VALANDRE.COM / LIBERTYMOUNTAIN.COM

One of the many cruxes, literally, of winter mountaineering is getting a good night's sleep. Over the past December and January, I tested two sleeping bags—the Odin Neo (for use down to -22 degrees) and the Thor Neo (-40)—from the French company Valandré, which specializes in down garments and bags.

As a guide in the White Mountains of New Hampshire, and as a long-suffering Alaskan climber, I've spent innumerable nights out in miserably cold conditions. At 6 foot 1 inch and 165 pounds sopping wet, I invariably crawl into my bag, get two hours sleep, wake up freezing again, add a layer, pee and lapse back into that brand of tepid shut-eye forever associated with things like airplane flights and alpine starts.

The Valandré bags, though, offer plenty of room and are warm and intelligently built—you can actually get good sleep in them. Why? Instead of mimicking other cold-weather bags and their small foot areas, the Odin and Thor have roomy foot boxes with ample space for hot-water bottles, inner boots, drying gloves, satellite phones, etc., without compressing the down and freezing your feet. This cargo room is an absolute must for sub-0 bags, and the space difference is as noticeable as the legroom between first class and coach.

Fast-and-lighters might decry that roominess, but it doesn't add significant weight compared to other models with the same temperature ratings: the Thor comes in at 4 pounds 1 ounce; the Odin is 3 pounds 9 ounces.

The most striking features of both bags are their 32 smallish individual down compartments. Most bags "lose" down in certain areas when it migrates across

the baffles. With these compartments, smaller and more numerous than in most other bags, Valandré has solved this problem. Down stays put, you stay warm. The down itself is 850-fill, 95 percent big clusters and 5 percent filaments and microfeathers of "fatty" gray geese from Southern France. "Fatty" refers to the strong, fresh and clean down produced by a fully mature bird during its fourth and final molting cycle. This mature down has a higher insulating capacity than down produced during previous molting cycles. As a result, the Odin and Thor do surprisingly well in wet, wintry weather, and the breathable fabric disperses moisture from the bag over the course of a night.

My one complaint about both bags (which differ only in the amount of down they possess) is that the draft collar is complicated with two Velcro closures and drawstrings. I tested the Odin during two separate mountaineering courses, both in subzero temperatures. I was able to sleep comfortably, making adjustments quickly and without rolling and fumbling around too much: The zipper works well and rarely gets stuck in the baffles of the bag.

The Thor is the Arctic explorer's or Denali suitor's dream: a -40 bag for long stays in frigid environments. I tested it during a Presidential Range Traverse this past winter, with temperatures well into the negatives and comparable to the lows I'd experienced in the Alaska Range. It was great to strip down to my long underwear, toss everything inside the bag, and still feel like I had plenty of room to move around.

—Michael Wejchert

In S, M, L

Right or left zip

850-plus-fill fatty
goose down

Roomy foot box

32 compartments
minimize down
shifting

For temps down
to -22 and -40

Thor - 4 pounds
1 ounce, Odin - 3
pounds 9 ounces



Scarpa Drago

\$200 / SCARPA.COM

The Scarpa Drago is the Ferrari LaFerrari of climbing shoes—it's sleek and sexy, and it radiates performance. It's a supershoe.

The Drago combines Scarpa's best climbing-shoe features into one. It has the active rand and lack of a midsole of the Furia for precision and sensitivity, and the slipper upper and heel cup of the Instinct VS for a skintight fit and locked-in heel. But the Drago has a life of its own when it comes to volume and suppleness—it fits like a rubber sock.

When I first saw the Drago, my toes ached at the thought of cramming into it. Yet when I put the shoes on, they were comfortable out of the box, with no break-in period.

Altogether, the Drago defies standard climbing-shoe dichotomies. It's a performance model that's comfortable. It's aggressively downturned, yet supple enough to smear on the smallest of smidges. It's super soft, yet can toe on tiny edges as well as, if not better than, stiff edging-specific shoes. It was designed as a specialized sport, bouldering and competition shoe, yet makes an excellent all-arounder; just don't try to crack climb in them.

I've used the Drago on the steep, polished sport climbs of Rifle, Colorado, on techy slabs of conglomerate sandstone, and for bouldering in the gym. Given its versatility, the Drago is both my onsight and redpoint shoe, and the choice when I can only take a single pair of climbing shoes.

With well over 100 pitches on the shoes now, I find their soft upper rubber is showing minor wear, while the sticky Vibram XS Grip2 sole rubber is holding up fine, and the microsuede upper has yet to enter the crusty-feeling stage of a used climbing shoe. But like Italian supercars, performance comes with a price. The Drago is one of the first climbing shoes on the market to hit \$200.

—Hayden Carpenter

Performance sport,
bouldering and
competition shoe

Comfortable out of
the box

Ultra-sensitive
and soft

Microsuede upper, no
midsole

Vibram XS Grip2
rubber