

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2011
EDITION 138

Cross Country

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PLYMASTER AVIONICS
WIN A VARIO
page 21

[BETWEEN THE SHEETS]

BETWEEN THE SHEETS

ICARO ENERGY CROSS

Good for hike-and-fly as well as everyday use, Marcus King goes on a vol-biv with Icaro's new baby



Photo: Fred Gustafsson

Since we reviewed the first batch of reversible harnesses several years ago, a plethora of variations on the theme have hit the market. While the initial offerings were relatively simple, now we have everything from day sacks which have string harnesses inside, to full-on reversible pods for long XC days out. Icaro have now entered the market with their Energy Cross reversible harness, aimed squarely at pilots who like to hike and fly.

While much of the competition uses relatively simple carrying systems, Icaro have sought to differentiate their product from the rest by providing a system worthy of a full mountaineering rucksack.

CLEVER DESIGN

The shoulder and hip straps are well padded and the hip belt has a good level of stiffening, which all helps spread the load more evenly; the only omissions are straps to pull the sack towards the hips.

The back area also has a good level of padding that has been shaped so a good airflow is maintained, allowing sweat to evaporate easily.

None of this careful padding and shaping is of any use though unless the setup fits your body shape. This is where Icaro have pulled out their trump card. You can't make a carrying system that will suit everyone. Different sizes can help but some people are tall and thin while others are short and, shall we say, not so thin. Icaro have addressed this by making the back length adjustable. You simply undo the Velcro on the lumbar support and fold it forwards to reveal a strap that allows you to lengthen and shorten the back. This is a real plus for tall people like myself, as the attachments on the shoulder straps remain in their optimum positions and no longer does the chest strap end up strangling me. The adjustment is easily made and once set up for you can be left alone.

BAG MODE

When in bag mode, there is plenty of storage for a standard wing and the usual accessories. Icaro have used Cordura materials in the construction which should prove hard-wearing. Although this makes the bag slightly heavier than some others, it means it will deal well with the everyday abuse that our bags receive – and it's still a significant weight saving over a separate harness and bag.

There is a large vertical pocket on the front of the bag, which I found was big enough to take my walking sticks folded up as well as plenty of other kit. This pocket is also a great place to keep valuables and small items when in harness mode. There is also a small zipped pocket on one side of



A comfortable harness for everyday use

the bag, and an elasticated one on the other, plus two more on the hip belt – great for carrying snack bars. A hole for your water tube from inside the bag to the shoulder strap, a pole-carrying strap and the chest strap buckle that incorporates a signalling whistle complete the features.

IN USE

I used the harness on a small vol-biv trip and found it very comfortable to carry. Whereas some convertible harnesses have limited carrying space, this bag was able to swallow my normal flying kit plus the extras I needed for a few days out in the mountains, including sleeping bag, small stove and food. The large zip pocket was great for keeping everything organised. It was easy to get the load well balanced and secure despite the extra weight.

Converting to harness mode takes a matter of seconds. The harness is very much an everyday harness with all the features you would expect. The straps do up using separate leg straps and a safety-T chest strap. These are all easily adjusted, as is the back angle. There is an underseat reserve container along with bridling going to the shoulder straps. An airbag protection system from Woody Valley protects the whole of the back area once inflated. There is a zipped side pocket on one side and an elasticated pocket on the other with a tie-in point, which is great for a camera etc.

In the air you won't notice any difference from a normal harness of this geometry. The seat plate is

quite deep and there is a good level of padding on the back support. This makes the harness a very comfortable place to spend your day, and I found no problems with it after a few hours in the air. Weightshift works well as does the speed system, although some pilots may prefer larger pulleys.

IN CONCLUSION

Icaro have produced a reversible harness that doesn't compromise either of its functions. It may not be the lightest product of its type, but what you get is a durable product that is great at being a rucksack and great at being a harness. **XC**

IN BRIEF

Type: Reversible harness for hike-and-fly and everyday use
Size: Seat plate width: Small, 32x35cm; Medium, 35x38cm; Large, 39x41cm.
Colours: Anthracite / light grey
Weight: 4.2-4.5kg
Cost: Circa €660 / £580 / \$900
Icaro say: "With its unique adjustable back rest it is easy to handle, elegant in design and offers lots of storage space. It's perfect."

www.icaro-paragliders.com



Back length adjustment strap



Good level of back and lumbar padding with ample airflow



Safety-T chest strap fastener