



OVERLAND

JOURNAL



Gear Guide 2010

T.A.D. Gear Spectre Hoodie LRP V2 \$290

I'm extremely wary of equipment "innovations" that offer no real new direction except an avenue to profit for the maker. An exception is so-called softshell outerwear, which offers a more breathable and quieter alternative to standard Gore-Tex hardshells, when you don't need storm-proof rain protection.

I had about given up trying to find a made-in-the-U.S. softshell jacket—until I discovered T.A.D. Gear in San Francisco. Their Spectre Hoodie never sees the inside of a shipping container with two million clones; it's made right here in small batches.

Slightly stretchy brushed nylon faces a polyurethane laminate to enhance water repellence; interior fleece adds warmth without bulk. I wore this one in a couple of pretty strong showers and stayed dry and warm—no Saran Wrap feel. Pitzips help venting, and nine pockets help storage of odds and ends. Per the name, a hood deploys for downpours or rolls out of the way.

I also appreciated the fact that the Spectre comes in khaki. I didn't have to choose between colors like "eggplant" and "turmeric." *tadgear.com*, 415-318-8252

Gränsfors Bruks Scandinavian Forest Axe \$130

You've heard the story of the grizzled woodsman who's used the same axe for 40 years: "Yessir—replaced the head twice and the handle three times, but it's the same old axe, by golly."

If he'd been using a Gränsfors Bruks axe, he might still have all the original parts. Gränsfors axes are hand-forged in Sweden by one of a small group of craftsmen, each of whom stamps his initials in the finished head (mine, according to the crib sheet on the website, was made by Kjell-Åke Sjölund). The handle is dense hickory, fitted to the head with a hydraulic press and a wooden wedge before a final steel wedge is driven in. The finished product is not coming apart.

Gränsfors makes many models, but I'm partial to their Scandinavian Forest Axe, a diminutive but versatile tool just 26 inches long and under three pounds in weight. It will sever any limb I need to, yet if I choke up on the handle it's as precise as a hatchet. At 57 on the Rockwell scale the edge retains the toughness needed in an axe, but with a good honing it will slice paper. The leather guard is not just for looks. *gransfors.us*, 843-875-0240

Mac's Tie Downs Trail D-Vise \$160

I've lost track of the times I've wrestled with a pair of Channellocks and a wrench trying to disassemble some vehicle component for a roadside repair. I also remember attempting to straighten bent tie rods by sticking them into various holes or gaps in bumpers and frames and leaning on them—an attempt that often fails when the bent piece suddenly twists back at me.

The Trail D-Vise would have made child's play of those situations. It's hard to thwart a four-inch vise attached to a 4,000-pound anchor.

The D-Vise fits a standard two-inch receiver, and the jaws can be oriented horizontally or vertically. Additional toothed pipe jaws below the flat jaws add tie-rod capability. The shaft is long enough to gain clearance from the bumper for most tasks, and there's even a little anvil behind the jaws for hammering stuff.

The D-Vise is a solid piece of gear at 16.6 pounds. You can decide if it's worth it to carry on weekend trips close to home. But on an extended excursion into remote regions, it could prove worth its weight in chrome-moly if you need a repair to regain mobility. *macscustomtiedowns.com*, 866-371-5175

