

EXPED GEAR PART 2

VENUS II 4 SEASON 2 MAN TENT



The second part of the Exped review involved taking the Exped Venus II 4 season 2 man tent through its paces. It was tested during multiple Sambar backpack trips, in addition to Red and Fallow scouting.

Throughout the field testing of the Exped gear, one thing I have noticed is the quality in the attention to detail. Quality is never overlooked. I have literally used and abused the gear from their current line for the past 6 months and have learnt to rely on it.

I have had this tent for some time now, so I can confidently give a quality review, not a 'backyard style' overview, unfortunately of which is commonly creeping into gear reviews recently. To do this tent justice, a New Zealand west coast style trip would really need to be taken, but unfortunately that will have to wait until May 2014.

When looking at the Venus II tents, there are currently three options; Standard, Ultra-light, Extreme. All three are identical to look at, but vary in other ways, each of which I will describe. I firstly will cover off some of the common features and then get into the main differences throughout the remainder of the article. The main focus of the article will be on the standard of the gear. This is what the field test was based around.

OVERVIEW

All three tents have a canopy area of 2.8m squared and are free standing tents with an exoskeleton design. The free standing system is

extremely handy for spots with limited flat ground or for a quick move to a better position for sleeping after the desired spot is found unsuitable. Pegs are still required to secure the fly when a position is selected.

When looking at the weight, I always look at the maximum weight, this tends to be what you would normally use. The trap for some people is that a lot of these tents require foot prints on anything that isn't meadow or soft ground that is not soaked when setting up. The footprint weight should be added to your weight calculations. This may bring a few ultralight tent weights back to earth. If they recommend you have one, you usually need one. During



my field tests I did not use a footprint.

The Venus II weighs in at 3.1kg, Venus II Extreme 2.95kg and the Venus II Ultra Light (3 season) 2.3kg as maximum weights. All three tents come with a well organised tent bag and pole bag with separate zipper sections for the pegs and repair kit. Foot prints for these tents are sold separately as with most competing brands.

The poles are all latest generation DAC with the Venus II and Ultralight tents sharing the same poles; DAC Featherlite NSL 10.25mm TH72M Aluminum. The Venus II Extreme has the same brand poles but surprisingly I found out that

they are the 9mm variety.

DAC pressfit poles are 15% lighter than competitors' poles with comparable strength. These poles are less susceptible to failure because the linkages are based on extrusion instead of glued inserts. This is the major cause of tent failures.

The venus pitches with an integral pitch so it will keep the inside dry if setting up in the rain. The Venus II incorporates a 3 pole system for strength and stability of the tent. The poles are colour coded for easy assembly and are pushed through pole sleeves for quick setup and low resistance. The poles are located in receiver

sleeves that are strong and make setup quick and easy.

The fly extends past the entry points to the tent and prevents rain from dripping into the tent when the doors are open to enter the tent or for cooking.

All three tents come with gear lofts which I found a little bit flimsy when field testing. When a headlamp or heavy item was stowed, they hung down quite a way.

Attention to detail and the little things is what sets these tents aside from their cheaper competition. Things like colour coded, reflective glow in the dark zipper tabs, end caps on the poles that make for far easier self tensioning, smart cord tensioners, dyneema cord stuff sacks that second as warning markers for your guylines, mesh pockets in the corners, grab hooks to easily roll up doors and peg loops for fast adjustment and fly tensioning.

The Venus II has two opposing adjustable air vents with solid supports to hold them open and ensure great ventilation. One thing that I was not aware of until after the field testing is that these same vent props can be used as pole repairs for when things get rough.

The Venus II has double layered canopy doors with both fabric and mesh panels. This is a feature that I used regularly on my hunts to air and dry items in the tent. With the panel open with mesh, the airflow is huge and makes the tent more than usable in summer.

The tent can be pitched with no inner for the ultralight trips or fly camps with a little more protection.

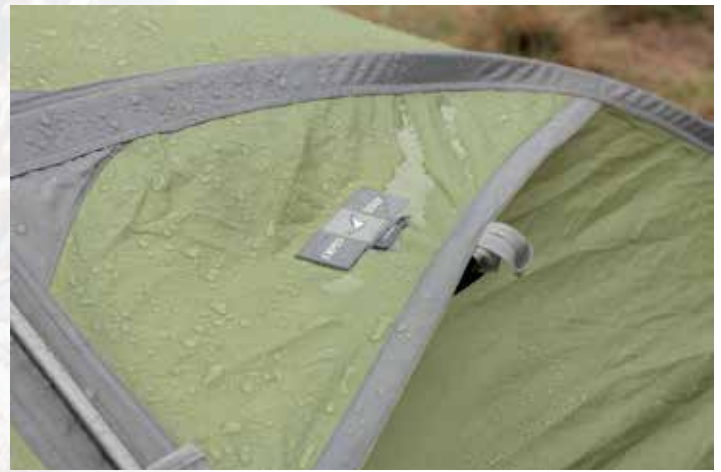
FIELD

When choosing between the three, I was looking for the most bombproof set up, particularly with the New Zealand west coast mountains in mind. This bombproof setup is always going to come at a cost of weight, but I was happy to wear that cost, especially considering it will normally be housing two people. Plus I have an ultralight tent already for backpack hunting in Australia.

I didn't choose the Venus II Extreme as I didn't feel that the 150g weight saving was enough for some of the benefits that I would lose. The main two things that led me away from the extreme was the fact that fly re-adjustment can be at times painful with the silicon flies (my ultralight tent has the same style fly). They are not as robust as the ripstop, if a branch falls on the tent, they are harder to repair with long runs. Also more susceptible to burning down as they are not fire retardant.

I did not use a footprint for my hunts, but having said that, I would still recommend one to extend the life of the tent and prevent floor punctures from rough grounds. Even so, the terrain I was in was extremely rough at points and there was no sign of any damage or holes.

The tent managed to see some wet conditions. I can say that not one drop of water entered the tent at any stage. The bathtub floor that raises 10cm from the ground ensures you have no



splash back.

I experienced strong winds that were not enough to even flap the fly. It certainly lived up to its 4th season rating in these conditions. There were times that I was thinking overkill, but with two people using it on every trip, the weight was no real issue.

The tent set up and take down is quick and easy with little involved in the process. On one Sambar hunting trip, I opened the entries to just the mesh, no see through window to air the tent out whilst doing a night's fly camping up high. When I returned, I had a tent of microscopic bush flea's (millions that had moved in and were small enough to fit through the tiny mesh). Nothing would have kept them out, but well worth a mention, next time I would have completely zipped up.

I could not fault the tent on any trip and the tent is ample for two people. The dual vestibules are also handy for not pulling in too much water to your bedding area and having separate spots for your wet gear.

The tent has numerous guy points which is paramount with any 4th season tent. The Dyneema ropes with smart cord tensioners see that your tent is as solid as you can possibly expect. I would not consider any tent without these features.

The tent is warm when all zipped up but still



breaths, so it doesn't turn the tent into a sauna. Vents are easily accessed on the tent for when some extra air flow is required. Condensation did exist a little bit, but was not a real problem. I have not been in a tent yet where it's not an

issue in one way. With both vents open, it is very much a non issue, but on the cold nights, you can expect to get a little over a night with two people in the tent.

The tent comes with a dozen narrow V stakes and 6 wide V stakes. There are plenty for mounting in different kinds of ground. The stakes never pulled on any hunt, however, I did manage to bend one belting it into a rocky camp.

One add on feature I want to mention that also led me to wanting to look at these tents was the new outer space extension vestibule. This transforms your Venus II into a far larger tent for those big trips where a bigger base camp tent is required. A roomy, dry sheltered space can make a trip all that more comfortable.

If you want a well built reliable tent that will see you through anything Australia and New Zealand has to offer, this is the tent for you. If you like the security of knowing your tent will stand up to whatever mother nature will throw at you, this is also the tent for you. I have no doubt that this low profile tent could see you through the worst storms and come out untouched at the other end.

If I was only using the tent for hunts in Australia, I would have seriously considered the Ultra Light version as I can be a gram counter when packing in. I believe the Ultra Light is on the stronger end of the three season rating. Its building materials and design would be ample for the worst conditions that the Australian backcountry could throw at you. It certainly would also get you out of most situations in New Zealand also.

After having my 3 season tent blown out in New Zealand, I would not go for anything now that isn't rated 4th season for those particular wilderness trips. If I only could own one tent, I would just wear the extra weight and enjoy the security of the Venus II for all my hunting.

After a 6 month field test and review, this will most definitely be the tent I rely on in New Zealand this year. I have complete faith in this tent in all conditions. There wasn't a single thing that concerned me about this tent whilst using it in the field and I can see it doing many a day on the hill when a bomb proof tent is required.

