

REI Quarter Dome T3



THE TAKE-HOME MESSAGE FROM THE YEAR'S BEST TENTS: LESS WEIGHT, MORE SPACE.

Who would choose a cramped two-person tent when you can get the extra elbowroom of a three-person model with no additional weight? Nobody here.

REI Quarter Dome T3

Easy to pitch and easy on the wallet, this tent is rock-solid when it comes to weather protection.

Consider the T3's numbers: At 4 pounds and 7 ounces, it's more than a pound lighter than its two-person predecessor (the Half Dome 2 HC), which earned an Editors' Choice Award in 2002. And it's \$60 cheaper than its nearest freestanding competitor. But the T3 is no lightweight in terms of protection. In the Cascades, Sawtooths, and Colorado Rockies, it sheltered testers from rain, hail, and high winds. To cut weight but not storm-worthiness, this tent uses one full-length and two three-quarter-length poles to form the dome's skeleton: A full pitch requires 12 stakes, but you can get away with six in mild weather. The interior has enough headroom for 6'3" guys sitting up, but squeezes them lying down. The mostly mesh body and two fly vents allow enough ventilation that condensation is almost non-existent. Each of the two tear-shaped doors has a moderate-size vestibule. You can also pitch the T3 in ultralight mode (3 lbs. 7 oz.) using only the poles, fly, and optional fastpitch footprint (\$30). Just one catch: Living space is tight for three full-size campers. Choose the T3 if you want castle-like room for two at a bargain price. \$289; 4 lbs. 7 oz.; (800) 426-4840; rei.com. Reader service #101



Big Agnes Copper Spur UL3

The lightest, roomiest tent we tested this year. Enough said.

With legit space for three sleepers, this tent weighs just a pound and change per hiker—you simply won't

find anything else this light, roomy, and weatherproof. To achieve such a rock-bottom weight, Big Agnes uses gram-saving poles and a silicon-treated ultralight nylon fly. Testers worried it might be too flimsy, but we had no problems even when the tent was pounded by wind and rain in the Rockies (the two-person version withstood gusts that shredded a lesser shelter). The three-season-plus strength is a result of poles interlinked with hubs, a short bridge pole, and well-placed guypoints. Condensation wasn't an issue, even in cool, drizzly conditions in Washington's Lakes Wilderness with three campers inside. Color-coded tabs make setup quick and eliminate the need for even glancing at the owner's manual. The floor easily fits three 20-inch-wide sleeping pads. Our six-footers reported plenty of room to stretch out, but they did gripe about the low doorways. Amazingly, despite the Copper Spur being 4 ounces lighter than the Quarter Dome T3, its two vestibules are 60% bigger, with storage space for a trio's gear. Like the T3, the Copper Spur pitches rainfly-only with an optional \$60 footprint (3 lbs. 4 oz. total weight). Caveat: Premium performance has a price—literally. \$500; 4 lbs. 3 oz.; (877) 554-8975; bigagnes.com. Reader service #102

“ These two tents defy the laws of backcountry shelter: Both weigh less than 4.5 pounds, one at an unbeatable price and one with unbelievable living space. ”