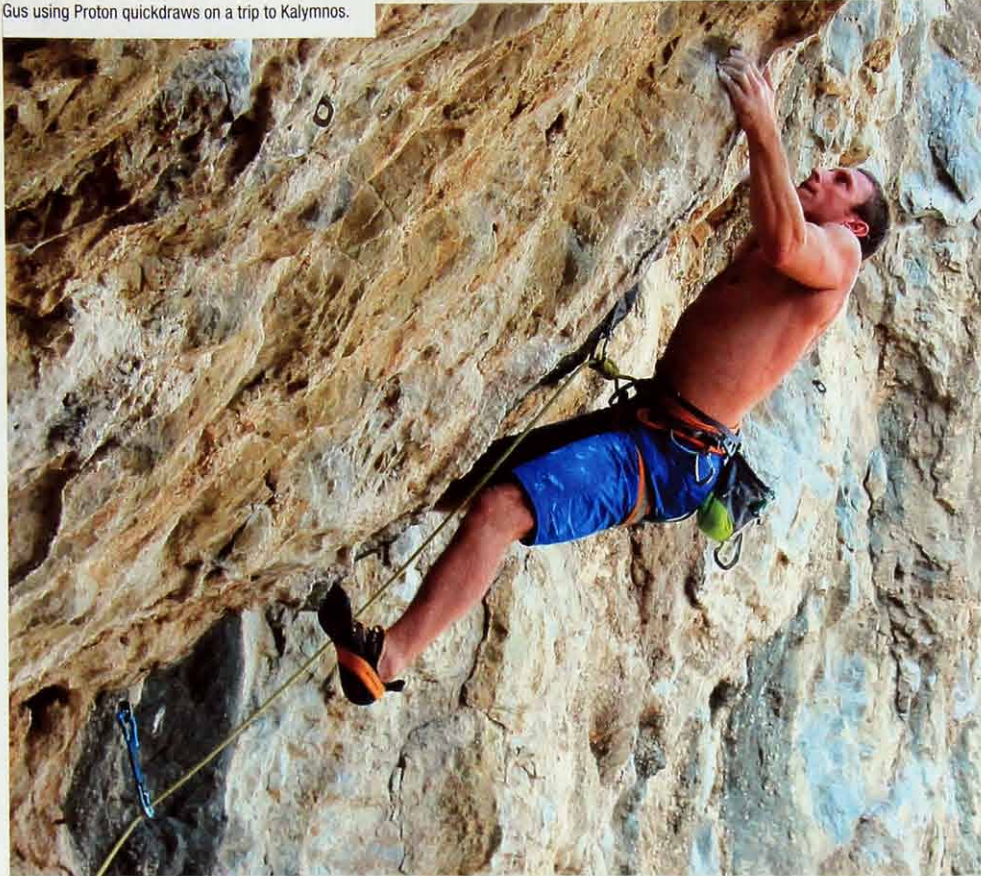


Gus using Proton quickdraws on a trip to Kalymnos.



Wild Country Proton Quickdraw 12cm.

Wild Country Proton Quickdraw 12cm £19; 17cm £19.50; 22cm £20

If there's one thing that's changed for my sport climbing trips these days, it's that I no longer pack a full set of my smallest, lightest, skinniest taped quickdraws to save weight on luggage. Instead I definitely put a few in my bag that have that more secure, 'chunky' feel, which can make all the difference when you're 40m up, pumped out of your box, feeling a bit psyched out and facing the route's crux. Not to mention when you bottle it and have to grab the draw anyway.

Because of this, I was pretty psyched to get the opportunity to test a full set of the Proton quickdraws, which are Wild Country's answer to the 'sport draw' concept that we are seeing from most key hardware brands these days. Visually they definitely look substantial, but I was struck at how light they felt despite weighing in a few grams heavier than some of the competition.

Not that it should matter but I thought the blue/gunmetal grey colour combo was pretty fly, the blue finish does wear off pretty quickly on the section of the krab that connects with the bolt (remember to always clip your draws the right way round kids) but this happens with all coloured quickdraws so is nothing to be concerned about, it might even help you keep track of wear a little easier rather than it being the same silver as the worn section.

Of more interest, however, and the other thing that draws your attention, apart from the colour, is the unusual shape of the karabiner on the rope clipping end of the draw. It's a bent gate as you'd expect but has a very square shape where the tape attaches and a 'notch' at the lower end of the gate. I don't think I'm exaggerating when I say that these combine to make it ridiculously easy to clip.

Efficient clipping has never been my strong point (I used to have to practise on a hanging setup whilst watching TV, because I was so rubbish at it) but even for me it's almost foolproof, the shape creates a natural place for the rope and finger to sit and then the smallest pressure facilitates a quick and easy clipping action. Added assistance is provided by the plastic 'vice' retainer, which together with the lack of angle created by the square shape at the top of the karabiner, stop pretty much any movement at this end of the draw during clipping. It also completely removes the chance of it spinning on the tape and inverting the karabiner when you pull your ropes through, dooming your redpoint to failure.

Elsewhere on the quickdraw, the tape is nice and chunky, so if it's all going a bit wrong it's a whole lot nicer than grabbing a skinny lightweight draw. I personally didn't have an issue with it but a couple of people pointed out that the tape is quite soft compared to other draws. If anything

this makes it more comfortable to grab. For me it's not something I feel needs changing, unless durability is an issue, especially if it would add any weight. The 'bolt clipping' end is a solid straight gate krab with a subtle but effective indent on the gate. This not only helps in use with a clipstick, but again, makes clipping really easy, as there is a catch effect when opening the gate with your thumb to put it into a bolt.

The Proton Quickdraws are available in three tape lengths, 12cm (£19), 17cm (£19.50) and 22cm (£20). Personally I found the 17cm versions the most useful length and, with regards to the price, I've been lucky enough to go on a few tours of climbing hardware manufacturers, so for those of you that think £17 is expensive, trust me that when you see all the time, effort and thought that goes into turning a karabiner from a metal rod into a precisely finished bit of safety equipment, it definitely isn't. If you are short of dough, however, but still fancy that easy clipping experience it is worth remembering that individual Proton bent gate krabs are available separately for around eight quid. All in all these are now my favourite go-to quickdraws due to the phenomenally easy clipping action and that extra feeling of security to be gained from a more substantial draw. And they match my shorts which is always a winner... ■