



## Pick Up the Pace

Kicks for getting faster, from race day to recovery jog  
BY LISA JHUNG AND CORY SMITH

### **Nike ZoomX Invincible** \$180

When Nike introduced the Vaporfly 4% in 2017, no other shoe received more attention. Now there's a new supreme in town. The ZoomX Invincible might not break speed records, but it rules for recovery runs. Calling it thick-soled would be a gross understatement. The heel stack starts at 35.1 millimeters and goes up incrementally with each size (36.6 millimeters in men's 10). It's one of the most generous maximum-cushion road shoes we've seen, and perfectly executed, too. The massive Pebax midsole feels fun and playful, like a moon bounce for your feet—a pleasant surprise for such a high-stack shoe. It pairs that responsiveness with plentiful shock absorption. One perpetually sore-legged tester noted that the shoe minimized all of her aches and pains. Meanwhile, the engineered knit upper is soft and airy. From top to bottom, Nike has created the best max-cushion shoe we've ever tested. Performance-oriented runners: pair the Zoomx Invincible with the Vaporfly 4% for an A-plus race-recovery two-shoe quiver. 11 oz (men's) / 8.9 oz (women's, pictured); 9 mm drop





a.

b.

c.

**BEST FOR EVERYDAY MILES****a. Asics Gel-Nimbus Lite 2** \$150

From recovery runs to up-tempo days, the Nimbus Lite 2 proved to be a smooth, reliable neutral trainer. It feels like a well-worn favorite right out of the box, with a plush design underfoot (the heel stack is 25 millimeters for men and 27 for women) and a well-padded upper that's made with 80 percent recycled polyester. The part-EVA midsole, which also incorporates bio-based cellulose nanofibers, features a futuristic protruding heel for a remarkably stable ride. As one tester put it, the shoe "easily disperses impact without clunkiness." Overall, it's a refreshing departure from the traditionally stiff and firm Asics platform. 9.1 oz (men's, pictured) / 7.8 oz (women's); 10/13 mm drop

**BEST FOR LONG, SPEEDY RUNS****b. Hoka One One Mach 4** \$130

When Hoka introduced the Mach in 2018, it earned our Gear of the Year award. "Thick, quick, and easy to love," was how we described it. Version four made us fall in love all over again. It loses a few ounces while adding an extra five millimeters of soft but energetic dual-density midsole. (The heel stack is 27 millimeters for women and 29 for men). "Not too firm and not too soft," said one tester. A wide platform with a flared, fishtail-style rear adds stability and dampens impact for heel strikers without compromising efficiency for fore- and midfoot runners. "It checks all the boxes," said one runner. "It's comfortable, lightweight, and stable." 8.2 oz (men's) / 6.8 oz (women's, pictured); 5 mm drop

**BEST FOR COMFORT****c. Salomon Predict 2** \$160

The updated Predict retains its predecessor's anatomical design—segmentation in the midsole and outsole that matches the major joints of the foot. The goal is to support a natural yet cushioned foot strike, which reduces hip and knee stress. Outsole grooves (deeper in version two) help these foam platforms move somewhat independently for a smooth heel-to-toe transition. But it's the new midsole that wowed us. Salomon uses injection molding to infuse plastic with nitrogen gas, creating a soft, more responsive foam. A padded, 3D-molded heel cup and socklike mesh upper boost comfort, while TPU overlays add structure. 9.7 oz (men's) / 9 oz (women's, pictured); 8 mm drop





d.

**Killer Value!**



f.



e.

#### BEST FOR MARATHON RACING

##### d. Puma Deviate Nitro \$160

If the Nike Vaporfly had a less famous, slightly heavier, more affordable cousin, the Deviate Nitro would be it. From the carbon-fiber plate, tall stack height (38 millimeters in the heel), and über-soft foam, not to mention the bright colors, the two bear striking similarities. Words like “bouncy,” “springy,” and “fun” echoed across our crew’s test notes. Some felt the midsole was “excessively soft.” On the other hand, the cushion addicts in our test group praised its responsiveness. “Puma has entered the next-level racing-shoe game,” reported one happy runner. Note: these run about a half-size small. 9.4 oz (men’s, pictured) / 7.6 oz (women’s); 8 mm drop

#### BEST FOR TRAINING

##### e. Under Armour Flow Velociti Wind \$160

Even without the embedded sensor that connects to Map My Run, the Flow Velociti Wind is the ideal training partner. It’s lightweight and secure, with a low stack (26 millimeters under the heel) and a rubber-free outsole—just exposed midsole foam that offers surprisingly tacky traction for a quick toe-off and great ground feel. That slim profile, combined with a peppy ride that’s firm but not too hard, is perfect for fast road efforts or squats and box jumps. Pair it with the app for real-time coaching cues or leave your headphones at home and geek out on your data post-run. 8.5 oz (men’s) / 8 oz (women’s, pictured); 8 mm drop

#### BEST FOR A QUIVER OF ONE

##### f. Brooks Launch GTS 8 \$100

Brooks took its feathery, flexible Launch 8 and beefed it up ever so slightly for those who need extra support. The new Launch GTS 8 provides light stability by way of small sections of dense foam integrated into the top of the midsole. These strips run from the inner and outer heel to the midfoot to limit pronation. Meanwhile, the midsole foam changes viscosity based on the force applied to it. This means it adapts to your stride, weight, and speed to both absorb pounding and return energy. “These feel snappy,” raved one tester. Our crew reached for the Launch GTS 8 for long runs and short, speedy efforts alike. 8.8 oz (men’s) / 8.1 oz (women’s, pictured); 10 mm drop



Outside  
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 YEAR**  
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## Dirt Devils

Make quick work of messy terrain  
 BY LISA JHUNG AND CORY SMITH

### The North Face Flight Vectiv \$199

The Flight Vectiv brings high-tech speed to the dirt. Like record-setting carbon-equipped road shoes (think: Nike Vaporfly), it has a full-length carbon-fiber plate that enhances forward propulsion and makes for a more efficient stride. Uniquely, the plate sits directly under the foot, between the footbed and midsole (instead of deep within the cushioning) and also extends up around the heel. This improves lateral stability off-road (though it's a bit tippy on very rocky trails) and generates an energetic, smooth ride that begs to go fast all day. "The rocker makes transitions at high speed on mellow terrain an effortless joy," raved one tester. Meanwhile, the 3.5-millimeter lugs grip well on everything from rock slabs to mud while still rolling smoothly over buffed dirt. The stretchy, single-layer, TPU-infused mesh upper is sleek, yet boasts Kevlar midfoot reinforcements, which minimize weight and bulk. Testers of all foot shapes and speeds felt locked in—and fast. Trail-shoe companies, take note: the carbon-fiber bar has been set. 10 oz (men's, pictured) / 8.6 oz (women's); 6 mm drop







a.



b.



c.

**BEST FOR ALL-DAY COMFORT**

**a. Hoka One One Mafate Speed 3** \$170  
A fan favorite among the ultrarunners in our test group, the Mafate Speed 3 was the best all-conditions, all-day trail shoe we tested. It's on the firm end of Hoka's cushioning spectrum, but according to one runner, it offers "great pop and bounciness." It isn't going to help you break any short-distance records (it's among the heaviest models in our test), but it's just the ticket for long days when comfort matters most. "This would be my 100-mile shoe," another tester declared. If you're looking for a durable workhorse for mega miles and find Hoka's Speedgoat or Challenger ATR too soft, the Mafate 3 is for you. 10.7 oz (men's, pictured) / 8.9 oz (women's); 4 mm drop

**BEST FOR ROAD TO TRAIL**

**b. Brooks Caldera 5** \$140  
Everything about the new Caldera is designed with cushion and flexibility in mind. Start with the 27 millimeters of midsole foam in the heel. Add on large grooves in the outsole, which help the shoe morph over rocks, roots, and uneven terrain. Testers loved the plush ride, which dampened hard surfaces like pavement and fire roads, and applauded the shoe's overall comfort. Relatively shallow, four-millimeter lugs add to this shoe's smooth feel on hardpack. The revised upper—a blend of hydrophobic and quick-drying polyester fibers—hugs the foot via stretchy bands that pull taut around the instep when you tie the laces. 10.6 oz (men's, pictured) / 9.4 oz (women's); 4 mm drop

**BEST FOR ZERO-DROP FANS**

**c. Altra Lone Peak 5** \$130  
Like a fine wine, the Lone Peak keeps improving with age. "Every update gets incrementally better," noted one tester and longtime fan. At first glance, the changes on this iteration aren't too apparent. It retains the same wide forefoot, zero-drop profile, and moderate 25-millimeter stack height. But underfoot, designers swapped in a softer, more durable midsole (the same that's in the brand's beloved Escalante). One tester described the resulting ride as comfortable, energetic, fast, and nimble—she felt like she could run forever. In a nutshell, Altra's stalwart has cemented its legacy as the quintessential no-frills, zero-drop trail shoe. 10.5 oz (men's) / 9.2 oz (women's, pictured); 0 mm drop





d.

Killer Value!



e.



f.

**BEST FOR RUGGED RUNS**

**d. La Sportiva Cyklon** \$160

Step into this bad boy, give the Boa dial a spin, and you're ready to charge on the most rugged terrain. The bootie-style upper extends higher over the back of the Achilles, where a stretchy cuff hugs the ankle to keep out trail gunk. Meanwhile, TPU shanks in the dual-density EVA midsole add stability and protect against underfoot jabs. Durable mesh and a TPU cap armor against stubbed toes. We felt equipped to go all out on steep, rocky trails, and loved the reliable traction that the generously lugged outsole provides when the going gets messy. The Cyklon was designed for European sky races, but for mortals it's a perfect peak-bagging shoe. 11.1 oz (men's) / 9.2 oz (women's, pictured); 8 mm drop

**BEST FOR VERSATILITY**

**e. Saucony Peregrine 11** \$120

The Peregrine offers great security on a range of trail conditions. Credit a wonderfully tacky rubber outsole and arrow-shaped lugs that point forwards in front for uphill traction and backwards under the heel for downhill braking. The shoe's EVA-TPU cushioning (27 millimeters in the heel) is neither too bouncy nor too stiff, and allows good ground feel for added surefootedness. A rock plate increases protection, and a new dual-layer mesh upper is both breathable and durable. For a shoe that can handle rocky, rooty terrain, the Peregrine 11 is notably lightweight and even speed inspiring, making it an excellent quiver of one. 10.9 oz (men's, pictured) / 9.5 oz (women's); 4 mm drop

**BEST FOR ALL TERRAIN**

**f. Topo Athletic Ultraventure 2** \$135

The Ultraventure 2 may not be as flashy as some competitors, but it is one of the best go-anywhere, do-anything trail shoes we tested. The three-piece injected-EVA midsole is firmer in the medial arch and softer in the lateral heel and main body, yielding a supportive ride. Meanwhile, toothy six-millimeter lugs kept us feeling stable. "I plowed through just about whatever," exclaimed one tester. Apprehensive about the nontraditional wide toe box? Don't be. Strategic minimal midfoot overlays and a well-designed lacing system lock you in perfectly. Besides, your toes will appreciate the extra room. 10.4 oz (men's) / 8.3 oz (women's, pictured); 5 mm drop