



Hammer Time

Aiming to pound out a PR? Turn to these.

BY LISA JHUNG AND CORY SMITH

Brooks Bedlam \$150

Typically, supportive road shoes can feel somewhat stiff and forceful in their guidance, lacking that peppy, cushioned ride neutral runners with good form so easily get from their footwear. Now there's the Bedlam, the perfect marriage between a stable platform and soft yet energetic cushioning. What struck a chord with our testers—earning it the Gear of the Year spot—was its ability to guide overpronators (and neutral runners who pronate when tired) softly into correction without the need for a traditional medial post or other stifling structural points. Heel to toe, the support feels extremely natural, never overbearing. The secret is a thin film of TPU that encapsulates the polyurethane midsole and keeps it from squishing too much and bottoming out, giving it a surprising amount of energy with every step. We loved how the one-piece knit upper laced comfortably around all types of feet, with its asymmetrical tongue anchoring us in like a firmly wrapped burrito. Bottom line: runners who crave support no longer need to be envious of all the cushioned fun their neutral-footed counterparts enjoy. The Bedlam made us feel secure without being suffocating, and it inspired forward momentum—as a good partner should.

11.2 oz (men's) / 9.9 oz (women's); 8 mm drop

ROAD SHOES

BEST FEATHERWEIGHT SHOE

New Balance FuelCell Impulse \$120

We expected the FuelCell Impulse to inspire fast running, given that it was the lightest shoe in our test and armed with New Balance's nitrogen-injected technology under the forefoot. (The company says nitrogen rebounds faster than EVA foam.) And it delivered. Toeing off felt particularly revved-up; the FuelCells worked as advertised, providing a hyper-responsive ride. The minimal knit upper and bootie construction added to the fast vibe—the Impulse almost feels like a sock on top of a firmly springy platform. But we did have to dial the lacing exactly right to secure a performance-ready fit. Otherwise it felt a little sloppy.

8.1 oz (men's) / 6.7 oz (women's); 6 mm drop



BEST CRUISING SHOE

Nike Pegasus 35 \$120

The Pegasus proves that age is just a number. Now 35 years in, Nike's all-time best-selling shoe is sweeter than ever. That's due in large part to design elements taken from Nike's illustrious Zoom Vaporfly 4 Percent's curved carbon-fiber plate. The midsole of the 35 has a snappy sensation, and, aided by an eye-catching beveled heel and slight rocker, transitions were easygoing and effortless. Cushion junkies should approach with caution, as one tester noted the firm midsole resembled that of "a racing flat." Still, testers across the board praised its silky ride at any speed. Women get slightly softer foam than their male counterparts.

9.9 oz (men's) / 8.1 oz (women's); 10 mm drop



BEST INSULATED SHOE

Under Armour Hovr Coldgear Reactor Mid \$140

Let's face it—frigid, wet feet just plain suck. Suffer no more with this high-tech cold killer that shrugs off foul weather. Enjoy toaster-like warmth from a tough-as-nails water-resistant outer layer. A high-top elastic-knit collar traps heat while ensuring moisture stays out. Any downside to the added insulation? A tight fit. Enough to consider buying a half size up. Underfoot, it's smooth sailing. The Hovr midsole delivers one of the most responsive rides in the business. The sticky Michelin rubber outsole (yes, the auto tire) provides a sense of security against the never-ending landmines of wet and icy patches.

10.9 oz (men's) / 8.8 oz (women's); 8 mm drop



TRAIL SHOES

BEST PROTECTIVE SHOE

Adidas Terrex Agravic XT GTX \$TK

Layer one of the most responsive midsoles on the market (Adidas Boost) on top of outsole rubber designed for tires on the world's fastest sports cars, wrap the whole thing in Gore-Tex, and what do you get? One badass, versatile, all-weather trail shoe. A low profile (15.5 millimeters in the heel and nine in the forefoot) means feet stay close to the ground, allowing precise footwork through those rocky fall lines where missteps can roll your ankles. The aggressively patterned Continental rubber outsole sticks like duct tape on wet or dry terrain but rides smoothly on mellow ground. A bombproof upper with thick, abrasion-resistant, welded materials lends hiking-boot durability and protection in this highly responsive trail runner.

12.5 oz (men's) / 11.5 oz (women's); 6.5 mm drop



BEST MAX CUSHIONED SHOE

Hoka Evo Mafate \$170

Toothy, five-millimeter lugs of grippy Vibram rubber underneath the Evo Mafate made our test team feel surefooted on trails in all conditions and roads in winter slop. Plus, we appreciated how, despite the trademark Hoka cush—it sits 33 millimeters off the ground in the heel and 29 at the forefoot—this shoe made us feel surprisingly agile, able to “deftly maneuver around rocks and branches,” said a tester. We chalk that up to the Kevlar wires integrated into the hydrophobic upper, which kept our feet secure in a lightweight cradle, allowing us to do the driving on this adventure-hungry shoe. Downside? Felt a tad “tippy” on fast, rocky descents. Still, the Evo Mafate is the most agile Hoka to date. 9.6 oz (men's) / 8.5 oz (women's); 4 mm drop



BEST ALL-MOUNTAIN SHOE

Salomon Ultra Pro \$150

Made for runners whose shortest runs are still in double digits, the Ultra Pro is a long-distance trail crusher. Its versatility and light-footed attitude in any terrain earned it King of the All-Mountain status. As one tester put it, “This is a comfortable, lightweight, nimble trail shoe for all terrain.” The upper's midsection has impressive give—a bonus for when feet swell—yet it's glued down with an easy cinch of the quick lace, instilling a “let's rip this technical descent” confidence. Just don't get too cocky. As one tester found, rock protection tapered off as you approach the forefoot.

10.3 oz (men's) / 8.8 oz (women's); 8 mm drop

