

# GEAR GUIDE

## ROAD RUNNING SHOES



### BEST DAILY TRAINER

#### a. Nike Vomero 17 \$160

Stepping into this shoe is like pulling on an old sweatshirt and a pair of pajama pants: it's insanely comfortable. Beneath the well-padded upper, the midsole features a slab of Nike's high-rebounding, soft PEBA-based ZoomX atop a base of firmer compression-molded EVA. The combination has an impact-dampening effect when going long, but also feels peppy when picking up the pace. "They're springy without being overly bouncy, supportive without being

clunky and heavy, and speed inspiring," said a tester from Colorado. The absence of a plate lets the forefoot flex more than many of today's shoes allow, and testers noticed their toes and arches engaging, particularly during up-tempo training. 10.6 oz (men's), 8.5 oz (women's); 9.5 mm drop

### BEST STABILITY SHOE

#### b. Brooks Glycerin GTS 21 \$160

Plush and stable, the Glycerin GTS 21 is a reliable, supportive training partner. Step-in comfort comes from a soft,

breathable knit upper that, joined to a thickly padded tongue and heel collar, enveloped our feet. The midsole, a nitrogen-infused blend of EVA and rubber, had testers using words like "vibrant," "smooth," and "springy." The stable ride comes from a wide base and raised sidewalls, denser on the arch side, that are designed to gently prevent foot wobble. "It doesn't have the zing of a super trainer, but it lets you relax and forget about your feet," said a tester. 10.5 oz (men's), 8.9 oz (women's); 10 mm drop

### BEST VALUE

#### c. Skechers Gorun Supersonic Max \$90

At a time when dropping \$150 to \$250 on running shoes is the norm, these max-cushioned, extremely capable trainers cost only 90 bucks. A fat midsole made of compression-molded EVA feels a tad clunky at first, especially compared with the ultrasoft foams found in more expensive shoes. But once on the road, testers found them smooth, comfortable, and easy to run in. There's no pressure to pick up the pace or to alter stride or

cadence to match the shoe's roll, bounce, or geometry. Said one tester, "They gently cushion without the squish and hyper-bounce of many of today's models. I landed comfortably, rolled smoothly and stably through the stride, and pushed off confidently." 11.5 oz (men's), 8.6 oz (women's); 6 mm drop

### BEST FOR UP-TEMPO TRAINING

#### d. Saucony Endorphin Speed 4 \$170

Saucony's first Endorphin Speed set the benchmark for the super-trainer



category, and version four continues that pedigree. The midsole features the same bouncy, energetic PEBA-based foam Saucony employs in its pinnacle marathon-racing supershoes. However, instead of a stiff, highly tuned carbon plate embedded in the midsole, the Speed's is semiflexible nylon, accommodating a wider range of paces and stride patterns. Midfoot wings on the plate work in conjunction with the Speed 4's deep side-walls and flared base for enhanced lateral stability. One tester observed that

this version "geometrically stabilizes the heel much better than in years past." Also new this year is a zonal mesh upper that hugs the foot securely and comfortably for fast-paced training. 8.2 oz (men's), 7.2 oz (women's); 8 mm drop

**BEST FOR RACE DAY**  
**e. Puma Fast-R 2 Nitro Elite 2** \$260

Puma did a top-to-bottom redesign of the original Fast-R, retaining only the decoupled design, which allows the front and back of the foot to move independently. A new midsole compound, called

aliphatic TPU, delivers industry-leading rebound and durable, consistent cushioning. Embedded in the midsole is a stiff, aggressively curved carbon-fiber plate that extends beyond the toe to enhance its lever action. Testers marveled at how smooth and speedy the shoe felt; one reported that he was able to run track repeats quicker in the Fast-R 2 than in other supershoes he'd tried. Complementing that race-ready ride is a comfortable, foot-hugging mesh upper. 9.3 oz (men's), 7.6 oz (women's); 8 mm drop

**BEST FOR CRAZY-COMFORTABLE MILES**  
**f. ASICS Novablast 4**

\$140  
 This shoe's sole is so tall it isn't race legal, yet we found the ride remarkably peppy, thanks to one of ASICS's lightest and bounciest blended-EVA midsoles. One tester described it as "more energetic than most cushioned training shoes I've tried, with the potential to pop off some zippy miles." A long, narrow section carved out of the wide sole allows the foot to sink and rebound, creating a trampoline

effect with each stride and adding stability without feeling clumsy or controlling. Testers agreed that it did the trick, citing the Novablast 4 as one of the stables max-cushioned shoes they'd encountered. 9.1 oz (men's), 7.9 oz (women's); 8 mm drop



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# GEAR GUIDE

## TRAIL RUNNING SHOES



We've got more trail-shoe reviews online.



a.



b.



c.

## Pace Makers

Maximize your stride

BY LISA JHUNG AND CORY SMITH

### MOST COMFORTABLE

**a. Brooks Caldera 7** \$150

This monster of a shoe is best when comfort and protection are priorities. "Brooks nailed the sweet spot for cushioning," said a Pennsylvania tester, noting that while comfortably soft, the midsole wasn't so squishy that instability and energy loss became factors. The midsole, a nitrogen-injected blend of EVA and rubber, extends up into high sidewalls, creating a cupping effect around the heel; coupled with an extra-wide footprint, it helped make the Caldera 7 one of the stabler rides we tested,

rolling like a 4x4 through moderately rough terrain. (We suggest steering clear of steep, rocky trails.) Beneath the thick midsole is a full-coverage outsole thickly studded with four-millimeter lugs, instilling a grip-it-and-rip-it attitude. 10.6 oz (men's), 9.4 oz (women's); 6 mm drop

### MOST VERSATILE

**b. The North Face Altamesa 500** \$155

This shoe delivered stable footing on terrain as diverse as Rocky Mountain singletrack and rutted Nebraska Sandhills cattle trails. That's thanks to a wide base, raised sidewalls that create a rear-foot cradle, and a grippy rubber outsole studded with multidirectional, four-millimeter lugs that can handle any surface (including wet rock). A thick stack of cushy

and forgiving gas-infused EVA-based foam underfoot and a nicely padded tongue and heel collar deliver a comfy ride, while a flared, flexible forefoot promotes engagement with the trail. "These have an interesting mix of cushioning and ground feel," said one tester, who noted that the rockered shape encouraged a smooth, forward-rolling stride. 10.4 oz (men's), 8.5 oz (women's); 6 mm drop

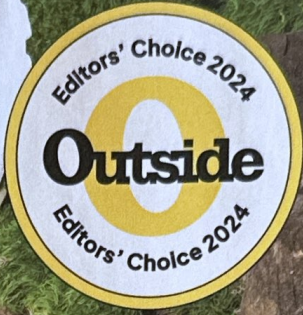
### BEST EVERYDAY TRAINER

**c. Altra Timp 5** \$155

Testers praised the Timp 5's fit; the instep wrap and heel cup held their feet securely, allowing minimal slippage on even the gnarliest terrain, while the short eyelet row and Altra's signature wide forefoot kept laces from cramping the ball of the

foot, enhancing forefoot flex and splay. The Vibram Megagrip outsole boosts traction on rocky surfaces, while the four-millimeter lugs are low-profile enough to roll smoothly on paved sections. The moderate-height midsole feels bouncy and bal-

anced underfoot. One tester noted: "I felt both connected to and protected from the ground." This shoe can settle in for long, slow, rugged miles or feel energetic when picking up the pace. 9.8 oz (men's), 8.6 oz (women's); zero drop



**BEST FOR FAST MOUNTAIN SCRAMBLES**

**d. Merrell MTL Long Sky 2 Matryx** \$160

This amazingly agile shoe lets you scale mountain trails like a bighorn sheep. The upper is made of Matryx—a breathable, quick-drying synthetic fabric reinforced with super-durable Kevlar—and keeps the foot secure, with a half-bootie tongue providing extra hold. The flexible EVA-based midsole enables confidence-inspiring proprioception and provides adequate cushioning, while the tacky Vibram Megagrip outsole with five-millimeter lugs delivers secure footplants on uneven trails. “This shoe makes you feel nimble and peppy on technical terrain, like you can run up hills and bomb descents faster than normal,” said

a Colorado tester. 8.3 oz (men’s), 6.9 oz (women’s); 4 mm drop

**EDITORS’ CHOICE**

**e. Adidas Terrex Agravic Speed Ultra** \$220

The Agravic Speed Ultra is the rare trail shoe that handles variable surfaces while providing the liveliness and improved efficiency of a plated supershoe designed for the road. The bouncy (but not too soft) TPEE-based midsole works in harmony with embedded rods that harness and direct the foam’s rebound while adjusting to the terrain to keep footplants

from tipping. A generous, flared forefoot enhances the stable stance. The lightweight woven upper offered secure lockdown while providing a touch of abrasion protection. The ample stack height—38 millimeters under the heel and 30 under the

forefoot—made testers somewhat cautious in rocky terrain; however, once the trail evened out, the Agravic Speed Ultra came alive, delivering an amazing ride that testers said felt like flying. 9.5 oz (men’s), 8.1 oz (women’s); 8 mm drop

**BEST BLEND OF COMFORT AND PERFORMANCE**

**f. La Sportiva Prodigio** \$155

La Sportiva shoes are known for a firm aggressiveness best suited to technical terrain. The new Prodigio introduces a softer, more approachable underfoot experience, thanks to a nitrogen-infused, EVA-based midsole that cushions without sacrificing energy return or ground feel. The dense rubber outsole with four-millimeter lugs stuck to rock like a climbing shoe and dug into dirt. Testers lauded the knit upper’s breathability, protection, and snug fit. “Comfortable enough for a casual trail run, but will go the distance in the mountains,” one said. 9.5 oz (men’s), 8.1 oz (women’s); 6 mm drop