

Pep Your Step

THIS YEAR'S SMOOTHEST-RIDING, MOST COMFORTABLE KICKS FOR ROAD AND TRAIL

By Lisa Jhung and Cory Smith

BEST COMBINATION OF FAST AND STABLE

Asics Magic Speed 2
\$150



◆ The Asics Magic Speed 2 transforms regular runners into superheroes, or at least makes them feel that way. "You can't help but clip along nicely in this shoe," said one tester. The speedy ride stems from a lightweight package that includes an aggressive toe rocker, two layers (softer over firmer) of cushy-yet-highly-responsive EVA-based foam, and an embedded, full-length plate made of a blend of carbon fiber and TPU that gives the shoe a hint of forgiving flexibility. This new version is more cushioned and stable than the first iteration, which ran more like a racing flat, but it still has a fast-tuned feel, making it best for days when you're rested and ready to fly. 8.3 oz (men's) / 6.9 oz (women's); 7 mm drop

BEST BALANCED BOUNCE

Altra Vanish Tempo
\$190



◆ Despite the Tempo name, testers unanimously agreed that this shoe isn't just for fast runs—you'll want to wear it every day. Like the Vanish Carbon, Altra's carbon-plated racing shoe, the Tempo has a 33-millimeter layer of bouncy nitrogen-infused midsole foam, a fast-rolling early rocker, and a simple flexible upper. But the plateless Tempo delivers a ride that is softer and more versatile, if not quite as snappy and propulsive. Testers all reported a plush and lively feeling regardless of pace or stride. The new Slim Foot-shape Fit, however, felt too narrow for those who like Altra's signature exaggerated wide toe box, while those used to other brands welcomed the more mainstream foothold. 8.2 oz (men's) / 6.9 oz (women's); zero drop

BEST MAX-CUSHION TRAINER

On Cloudmonster
\$170



◆ All shoes from On feature funky open pods underfoot that compress then rebound, balancing cushioning and responsiveness. Though we've enjoyed running in some of those models, many tend to feel a tad hard. The Cloudmonster is different: Its 33-millimeter-thick midsole has ten rows of massive hexagonal pods—the largest on any On shoe to date—that deliver a cushy ride. Yet it's surprisingly stable and lively as well. Above the pods, a full-length flexible and responsive polypropylene plate delivers a smooth transition from heel strike to peppy toe-off. Testers called the shoe fun and bouncy to run in, well-suited for long runs, recovery runs, or anytime you're craving a little extra foot coddling. 9.7 oz (men's) / 8.1 oz (women's); 6 mm drop



BEST FOR BOUNCING OVER TRAILS

Saucony Endorphin Edge
\$200



◆ The latest trail shoe attempting to harness carbon fiber's snappy ride for the off-road runner, the Endorphin Edge is one of the most successful. It delivers a super shoe's bouncy, energetic feel, thanks to its ultra-light, soft-and-responsive PEBA-based midsole—but it doesn't sacrifice its ability to tackle tricky terrain, courtesy of a custom, three-quarter length Y-shaped Carbiter plate. The secret to the plate is that it flexes upward but not downward, allowing it to adapt to uneven footing upon landing while providing a stiff curved lever when it's time for propulsive push-offs. "The shoe has noticeable energy return and recoil that doesn't detract from trail sensitivity," noted one tester. 9 oz (men) / 7.8 oz (women); 6 mm drop



BEST FOR CHARGING UP MOUNTAINS

Salomon Pulsar Trail
\$130

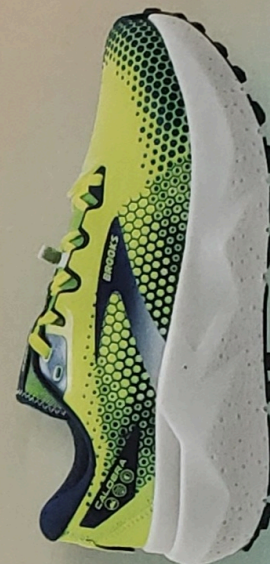


◆ The Pulsar Trail is a solid choice for a range of mountainous trail conditions. The outsole, made from a grippy rubber compound with sharp-edged 3.5-millimeter lugs, had us feeling surefooted on everything from sandy trails strewn with sharp lava rocks in Hawaii to tacky, rooty singletrack in Colorado. But the lugs are also low, long, and flat enough to handle hard dirt and even pavement. One-pull Kevlar laces combined with contoured foam around the heel provide a secure confidence on technical terrain or when picking up the pace. Underfoot, two layers of cushy-and-peppy EVA and Olefin-blend foam surround a light, flexible TPU plate, delivering "noticeable snap and verve," according to one tester. 9.8 oz (men's) / 8.5 oz (women's); 6 mm drop



BEST FOR ZONING OUT AND ESCAPING

Brooks Caldera 6
\$150



◆ With 39 millimeters of bouncy cushioning from lightweight DNA Loft v3—a combination of EVA, rubber, air, and nitrogen—the Caldera is meant for comfort and security over speed. Its wide base flares out from the top of the midsole where it surrounds your foot like a bucket seat, while a combination of a gusseted tongue and lacing eyelets that wrap all the way down to the midsole lock you in. The result is a forgiving shoe that enables you to roll over varied terrain without having to focus too hard on foot placement. We loved it for both short and long runs when we needed a shoe to let us zone out and run mindlessly, like when hitting the trail before dawn (and coffee). 11.0 oz (men's) / 9.8 oz (women's); 6 mm drop