

Don't Bring Me Down

Heavy has gone the way of the dinosaur

BY LISA JHUNG AND CORY SMITH

Scarpa Spin Ultra \$150

Creating a shoe that works for everything—from casual runs to blasting up and down the local hill after work to ultra-distance training and racing—is hard to do. But Scarpa accomplished it with the new Spin Ultra. Protection and supportive rigidity come from the combination of a durable Vibram Litebase outsole (40 percent thinner than standard rubber) and an H-shaped TPU insert that allows for some forefoot flexibility. Vibram Megagrip lugs serve up unparalleled traction. All-day comfort comes from ample cushion (25-millimeter stack height) and a stretchy tongue that connects at the footbed, hugging your foot without suffocating it. All that greatness in a competitively lightweight package makes the Spin Ultra the only trail runner you need. 9.3 oz (men's) / 7.8 oz (women's, pictured); 6 mm drop



**BEST COMFORT TO WEIGHT RATIO****Altra Superior 4** \$110

The Superior gained some heft in its adolescence, leaving behind its nimble, lightweight childhood. But this year it's back to its roots as a playful trail shoe with a top-to-bottom overhaul, including an 18 percent drop in weight from version 3.5. Altra introduces a new midsole, Quantic, a blend of firm and forgiving foam. And the upper, with its overlay-free design and burrito-wrap tongue, swaddles the midfoot. As usual, Altra's wide toe box got mixed reviews. Still, this is the best Superior yet. 7.9 oz (men's, pictured) / 6.3 oz (women's); zero drop

BEST FOR WOMEN**Merrell Antora** \$110

Sometimes claiming that a shoe (or any piece of gear) is designed for women is a marketing ploy. Not here. The Antora earned high marks from our female testers. "Felt natural for my feet," said one. "Supportive and cushioned just right," said another. The gender specificity comes courtesy of a midsole that's plush at the heel and firmer under the big toe for stable transition, plus a higher arch, narrower heel, and wider toe box than in Merrell's men's shoes. The Vibram outsole and multidirectional lugs were grippy even on wet leaves. 8 oz; 5 mm drop.

BEST FOR WET TRAILS**Adidas Terrex Speed GTX** \$180

No need to approach messy trails with trepidation in this foul-weather gem. The lightweight Terrex Speed GTX is built for short and middle-distance trails. It debuts Gore-Tex's new 3D Fit—an elastic layer that wraps the foot like a sock—and merges it with a waterproof knit upper. EVA in the midsole is firm but responsive. The short stack height keeps you low for precise footwork when the going gets technical, and Continental rubber provides some of the best traction in the business. 9.7 oz (men's, pictured) / 8.3 oz (women's); 6 mm drop



BEST ALL-MOUNTAIN CHARGER

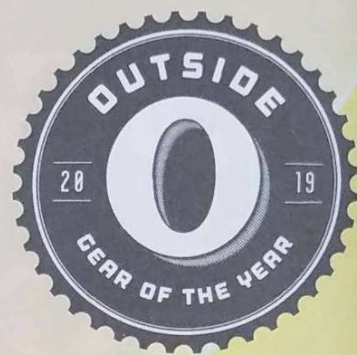
Hoka One One Speedgoat 3 \$140
 There's a reason the Speedgoat was a favorite with ultrarunners from the start—a couple, actually. The toothy Vibram Megagrip lugs offer killer traction, and that surefootedness, combined with massive Hoka cush, inspires confidence on technical terrain. Updates on the third version include an integrated tongue and repositioned overlays to help minimize foot slippage on steeps, and a heartier toe bumper to protect against rocks. But the Speedgoat 3 still feels, as testers put it, “light and flexible.” 10.3 oz (men's) / 9.1 oz (women's, pictured); 4 mm

BEST FOR SHORT RACES
Arc'teryx Norvan SL \$150

The sleek Norvan SL features a thin tongue and low profile around the heel collar, minimal cushioning, and amazing traction on everything from slabs to mud (thanks to a Vibram Megagrip outsole). But with minimalism comes rocks and roots poking up underfoot, which had us maneuvering around those obstacles—not a bad thing. In fact, testers called this shoe “downright fun.” Flexibility and low weight make the Norvan a good choice for quick jaunts. Hydrophobic mesh gives it serious warm-weather chops. 6.5 oz (men's) / 5.6 oz (women's, pictured); 7 mm drop

BEST FOR WELL-GROOMED TRAILS
Saucony Switchback ISO \$140

What do you get when you take the soul of Saucony's 2017 Gear of the Year—winning Freedom ISO road shoe and layer it with a trail-ready outsole? A dynamo that excels at flying over smooth terrain. With an Everun midsole, the Switchback ISO delivers a snappy, responsive ride. Runners seeking a natural feel will enjoy its sensitivity underfoot, but beware of rocks. On-the-fly lace adjustments are easy with the Boa system. If ripping down level trails is your jam, this shoe won't disappoint. 9.8 oz (men's, pictured) / 8.8 oz (women's); 4 mm drop



Fleet Street

Seven supremely capable shoes for the pavement
 BY LISA JHUNG AND CORY SMITH

Skechers Performance GoRun 7 Hyper \$125

Here's a true zero-to-hero story. Last year the Skechers GoRun barely got our attention. One model later, our testers won't take them off their feet. What changed? It's a more versatile shoe, balancing soft cushioning for recovery days with plenty of pop and energy for tempo runs. Skechers hit a gold mine with its new midsole compound, called Hyper Burst. Using a proprietary, mechanically blown process, the brand lightened up the foam by 15 percent while increasing durability over its previous midsole. As one tester put it, "Whatever deal with the devil Skechers had to strike was worth it. This midsole has a ton of energy and zing. The Hyper Burst foam is soft to the touch but doesn't feel mushy." Underfoot, severe rocker slings mid- or forefoot strikers with each stride. The knit upper is so cozy that one tester said, "If my slippers were running shoes, this is what they would feel like." Don't let the bland aesthetics fool you: Skechers is the undisputed champion with this GoRun. 7.8 oz (men's, pictured) / 6.1 oz (women's); 4 mm drop

**BEST RACER****On Running Cloudsurfer** \$150

From the Swiss company that patented the CloudTec system—funky rubber pods that compress when you step and release on toe-off—comes the fast-feeling Cloudsurfer. This shoe runs lighter than it is. Testers loved that it was “responsive yet cushioned,” with a “snappy feel.” Smooth transitions, a secure fit around the heel, and traction on wet surfaces (the new zigzag pattern on each outsole pod is a winner) inspired us to pick up the pace. Long-haul comfort comes from the pliable engineered-mesh upper and two layers of EVA foam. Note: small rocks tend to get lodged between the pods, so keep this shoe on the road. 11.6 oz (men’s) / 9.3 oz (women’s, pictured); 6 mm drop

MOST CUSHIONED**Brooks Glycerin 17** \$150

We’ll admit, words like *cushy*, *responsive*, and *smooth* have become a bit cliché. (We’ll also cop to overusing them.) But the Glycerin 17 raises the standard by which all other maximalist shoes should be judged. As one tester put it, this shoe is “cushioned to perfection.” The magic is in the midsole—a mixture of EVA, rubber, and air called DNA Loft. Rubber boosts the EVA’s longevity, while air reduces weight, giving “a soft ride and a light bounce that keep you comfortable,” as one tester put it. From recovery runs to long outings, this high-mileage workhorse’s pillowy landings and efficient transitions left us grinning. 10.6 oz (men’s, pictured) / 9.2 oz (women’s); 10 mm drop

BEST SPEEDSTER FOR LARGE RUNNERS**ASICS Gel-DS Trainer 24** \$130

The Gel-DS Trainer has long been a go-to for those who like to run fast but need some stability. It’s always been lightweight, sleek, and semi-firm, but this year the fit gets amazing: it’s the first ASICS shoe to join the knit-upper revolution. And we dig it. Testers said it was breathable and accommodating, though it took a couple of runs to break in. The firm midsole and solid traction—thanks to small lugs made with ASICS’s high-abrasion rubber—add to the agile ride, most noticeably in tight turns and while accelerating. A low-volume shoe with a secure heel, the Gel-DS Trainer makes you feel locked, loaded, and ready to fly. 8.7 oz (men’s) / 7.1 oz (women’s, pictured); 8 mm drop



MOST SUPPORTIVE
Hoka One One Arahi 3 \$130
 Running shoes used to have to sacrifice weight and cushion for stability. When it debuted in 2017, the Arahi challenged that status quo. The third iteration continues the original's trend-bucking ways—weighing eight ounces for women and under ten for men, it's one of the lightest stability shoes on the market. Hoka gave the upper new life by removing the overlays and softening the mesh, resulting in a much airier, more comfortable feel. On the road, the Arahi's thick stack and wide waist produce a steady ride. The downside, as one neutral-footed tester noted, is that the extreme girth felt somewhat clunky and blocky. 9.6 oz (men's) / 8 oz (women's, pictured); 5 mm drop

BEST FOR LIGHTWEIGHT STABILITY
Salomon Sonic RA 2 \$130
 Some shoes need a little love to reveal their true colors. The Sonic RA is one of them. Testers found it stiff out of the box, with a firm ride. But after a few outings, the Energycell Plus midsole came alive; testers able to produce enough force to flex the forefoot during toe-off were rewarded with a propulsive spring forward. Slimmer runners may struggle to get the same result. The new upper—seamless engineered mesh—is a welcome change. Overall, this is a scrappy lightweight that can take a beating, and one of the most durable of our test. "A good midrange shoe with comfort, support, and stability," said one tester. 9.2 oz (men's, pictured) / 7.8 oz (women's); 8 mm drop

BEST FOR ALL-DAY COMFORT
New Balance 1080v9 \$150
 Yes, this is a supremely cushioned neutral shoe, but the lack of medial post or targeted structure would usually scare off anyone needing stability. So we were pleasantly surprised by the 1080v9's steadiness. We chalk it up to the shoe's new 3-D-molded heel collar, an engineered-mesh upper that wraps securely around the arch for a supportive fit, and a broad midsole and outsole base under the forefoot. And the cushion? The ninth iteration of this shoe boasts full-length New Balance Fresh Foam, a midsole testers called "springy" and "speed inspiring." The 1080v9 was so comfy that we found excuses to wear it just walking around. 10.4 oz (men's) / 8.9 oz (women's, pictured); 8 mm drop