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Shoes that Do It All

From minimalist mountain racers to surprisingly techy maximalists, there's no need to compromise.

A shoe can make or break the trail-running experience and, rightly so, we trail runners demand a lot out of our running shoes. We want protection, but also ground-feel; cushion, but also agility; support, but also flexibility; light weight, but also durable materials; mud-worthy tread, but also a smooth ride. Everyone has a different definition of the perfect trail shoe. But one thing is universal: our expectations are lofty ... some might say unrealistic.

Yet, somehow, trail brands have managed to turn our complex demands into real, trail-ready shoes. From cushioned-yet-nimble maximalists to lightweight-but-protective mountain racers, here are 12 of the most exciting shoes on the market this spring.

FIT: Performance fit, with a narrow toe box.

BOTTOM LINE: Ideal for fast, technical mountain runs. The stiff midsole and minimal cushioning might be uncomfortable for longer distances.



SCOTT SUPERTRAC RC

PRICE: \$150
 WEIGHT: 8.8 OZ
 DROP: 5 MM

The Supertrac RC is the lovechild of a racing flat and an aggressive mountain-running shoe. It is the lightest shoe we tested, but, compared to other shoes in the same weight range, the Supertrac offers a shocking level of protection and security over slippery, technical terrain.

Traction was the biggest selling point for our testers, who all remarked at the confidence they felt charging steep, muddy downhills and loose, rocky singletrack. The aggressive, chevron-shaped lugs are oriented in a unique circular pattern, which affords traction for sidehilling, banked turns and tight, winding singletrack.

True to its low profile and racing pedigree, the Supertrac is stiff—though, again, well-cushioned compared to other shoes in its weight class. Rocker in the forefoot provides a smooth ride, avoiding the “slappiness” typical of such a rigid shoe. The foot-hugging, tightly woven upper does require some wrangling to slip into—and may limit breathability and drainage—but, once laced, it provides a reassuringly secure fit. The tongue is un-gusseted, but the ribbed padding keeps laces in place.

FIT: Narrower than previous iterations of the same shoe.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a fast, stable and agile shoe good for long distances over technical terrain. Not ideal for mud.



HOKA ONE ONE CHALLENGER ATR 3

PRICE: \$130
WEIGHT: 9.5 OZ
DROP: 5 MM

The Challenger ATR 3 is the same reliable all-rounder it's always been—just faster, stiffer and more adept on technical terrain. The ATR 3 retains its most identifiable features, including modest (relatively speaking, to say, the Mafate) stack height, a sparse lug pattern with exposed midsole foam and characteristic rocker that makes for a smooth ride on both trails and pavement.

But thanks to a stiffer midsole and an updated, narrower fit, it is more supportive and more agile than the ATR 2. This is especially noticeable when sidehilling. Despite hefty cushion, the ATR 3s do not compromise on ground feel, and grip admirably on rock, scree and hard-packed snow.

The upper mesh is more tightly woven than earlier iterations, reinforced with delicate, crisscrossed overlays that enhance durability and support without adding weight. The toe bumper has also been reinforced.

BROOKS CALDERA

PRICE: \$140
WEIGHT: 9.9 OZ
DROP: 4 MM

As one tester described, Brooks' Caldera is the Subaru Outback of trail-running shoes: stable, protective and reliable in all conditions. The shoe is generously cushioned, with moderate forefoot flexibility and torsional stiffness, for a nimble, responsive and lightweight ride. Testers found themselves reaching for this shoe on a daily basis, for its supreme comfort, sticky outsole and ability to tackle technical terrain.

The textured lugs are more grippy than their low profile might suggest, particularly noticeable on rocks and in wet conditions (however, after 100 miles, testers were disappointed to find the lugs ripping off the outsole). With a relatively low heel-toe drop, the Calderas manage a decent amount of medial support via increased midsole density under the arch, which overpronators will appreciate.

The upper is light, with durable toe and heel bumpers and prominent overlays across the midfoot. Some testers had trouble with the laces loosening.

FIT: True to size, with a roomy toe box.

BOTTOM LINE: An ultra-distance mountain runner that's so comfortable you'll want to keep it on for post-run drinks.



FIT: True to size, with a roomier toe box than a typical Salomon Sense shoe.

BOTTOM LINE: Jack-of-all-trades, this shoe is ready for a long day in the mountains or a jaunt through the park.



SALOMON SENSE PRO MAX

PRICE: \$150
WEIGHT: 10.2 OZ
DROP: 6 MM

Cushion-lovers rejoice: there is finally a Salomon Sense shoe for you! This new addition to the Sense line features a stiff, amply cushioned midsole, with a wider toe box than traditional Salomon models. With the added cushion comes some added weight, but don't let the shoe's beefed-up appearance fool you. The Sense Pro Max is surprisingly light, agile and responsive, toeing a healthy balance between protectiveness and "spring." The mid-sized, diamond-shaped lugs are equally at home on technical mountain terrain, dirt and paved bike paths.

Testers unanimously remarked at how comfortable the shoe felt out of the box. The upper is airy, with a thin, gusseted tongue that wraps around the sides of the foot.

FIT: Narrow, performance fit.

BOTTOM LINE: This shoe is ideal for short and fast missions, for those who don't like a lot of cushion.



FIT: True to size, with a roomy toe box.

BOTTOM LINE: This shoe is good for technical, sub-ultra runs.



ADIDAS AGGRAVIC SPEED

PRICE: \$120
WEIGHT: 9.2 OZ
DROP: 8 MM

This barely there shoe features a thin, un-padded upper and minimally cushioned midsole, with low-profile lugs that transition well from pavement to trails. Adidas makes up for the small lugs with an uber-grippy Continental-rubber outsole that lends an unexpected degree of confidence on rock, wet slabs and other technical surfaces (though is not ideal in thick mud). The midsole is quite firm—some testers felt it was too firm—with adequate flexibility in the forefoot.

Testers' favorite feature is the stretchy, neoprene-like inner-sock liner, which wraps snugly around the foot for a fast-feeling, performance fit. This inner liner is strategically perforated—even so, it is not as breathable as typical mesh.

ALTRA KING MT

PRICE: \$140
WEIGHT: 10.2 OZ
DROP: 0 MM

The Altra King MT is sleek and fast, but surprisingly aggressive. With a stack height of just 19mm, the low-profile King MTs don't look like much ... until you turn them over and look at the outsole, which is equipped with a tight pattern of six-millimeter lugs. The midsole is minimally cushioned, and reinforced with a midfoot rock plate. The combo of an aggressive sole and a rock plate doesn't compromise flexibility or ground feel, though some testers said the King MT felt less cushioned than their other Altra shoes.

In place of supportive midfoot overlays, Altra has added a unique Velcro strap, and testers appreciated the added security it offered through the midfoot.

LA SPORTIVA AKYRA

PRICE: \$140
WEIGHT: 11.4 OZ
DROP: 9 MM

The Akyra is a rugged mountain beast, ideal for technical mountain running where precision and grip are of the essence. But despite its bulky appearance, this shoe is surprisingly agile. The moderately stiff midsole and aggressively lugged, sticky outsole transition seamlessly from singletrack to a mid-run scramble session, lending confidence on smear-y slabs and small, technical features. These shoes are also exceptionally stable, with substantial medial and lateral posts.

Traction and run-hike-climb adaptability aside, testers were particularly enamored of the shoe's secure fit, especially through the heel. The tongue is gusseted and comfortably padded, while the upper is breathable, with hefty protective overlays that lend a certain degree of protection against water. Said one tester, "I stood in a stream for a full minute before my socks felt wet."

FIT: True to size, with a high, supportive ankle.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a rugged mountain shoe that runs well and lends confidence on technical, rocky terrain.



FIT: On the long and narrow side, with a wide heel counter.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a capable mountain runner for those who prefer ground feel over protection, and a great dirt/grass/gravel runner for everyone else.



SCARPA SPIN

PRICE: \$130
WEIGHT: 8.9 OZ
DROP: 4 MM

Runners who want total ground feel will love the Scarpa Spin. This shoe is on the minimal side, with a thin, flexible midsole and low cushion. The shoe does have a rock plate, though several testers remarked that they were able to feel the contours of everything on the trail, including pointy rocks. Ground-feel aside, this shoe performed well on technical terrain and was surprisingly stable for its minimal construction, though noticeably lacking in arch support.

In contrast to the minimal midsole, the outsole is on the burlier side, with lightly textured, medium-depth lugs. The upper is moderately padded, with a thin, gusseted tongue.

FIT: True to size, snug in the heel and forefoot, with an average-size toe box.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a tough, protective, durable shoe that is surprisingly light for its size.



UNDER ARMOR HORIZON KTV

PRICE: \$130
WEIGHT: 9.8 OZ
DROP: 7 MM

The Horizon KTV is ready to take whatever the trail dishes out. A stiff, relatively dense midsole wards against roots and rocks, while mid-sized lugs grip loose surfaces. Despite its rigidity, the Horizon KTV is surprisingly lightweight. An aggressive heel counter and plush Achilles cushioning make for a dialed fit through the rear, with a snug sock-like liner in the forefoot.

The upper features broad TPU overlays, in particular over the toe cap. This enhances the shoe's durability, water resistance and ability to keep out debris—but might also limit breathability in warmer temps, or quick draining after stream crossings.

FIT: True to size, with an extra-wide toe box. Secure through the heel and midfoot.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a good all-around trail shoe for runners looking to transition toward minimalism, or minimalists looking for a bit more cushion and stability for the long haul.



FIT: Snug and secure, true to size.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a good crossover road/trail shoe, for door-to-door missions on pavement and dry singletrack.



FIT: Narrow to medium.

BOTTOM LINE: This is a technical mountain-running shoe, good in sloppy conditions.



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**TOPO
TERRAVENTURE**

PRICE: \$110
WEIGHT: 10.4 OZ
DROP: 3 MM

The Topo Terraventure is a minimalist shoe that all runners—even non-minimalists—can enjoy. With a max stack height of 25mm and a 3mm heel-toe differential, this shoe hits a sweet spot between ultra-distance cushion, zero-drop minimalism and barefoot-style ground feel. The midsole is plush, and the outsole is thoughtfully laid out, with aggressive, 6mm lugs concentrated in the forefoot and heel. Presumably in a weight-saving effort, Topo has left a section of raised, uncovered foam in the midfoot. The result is protective, cushy and grippy with the flexible feel of a barefoot running shoe.

Testers found this shoe to perform exceptionally on technical terrain, particularly on rocks and softer, loamy surfaces (though not so in sticky mud). The upper is thin and breathable, with cushioning in the heel and an extra-wide toe box. The well-fitted heel and midfoot TPU overlays offer support and keep the foot from sliding around.

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**NEW BALANCE
FRESH FOAM HIERRO V2**

PRICE: \$125
WEIGHT: 10.6 OZ
DROP: 4 MM

The New Balance Fresh Foam Hierro V2 is an ideal road-trail crossover for runners who like a lot of cushion. The shoe pairs a stiff, Vibram outsole with a thick, soft midsole made of New Balance's proprietary Fresh Foam. Despite its heft, the Hierro runs surprisingly lightweight and bouncy, though ground feel is compromised. While it holds its own on technical terrain, testers found that the closely spaced, low-profile lugs struggled on slick surfaces and performed best on dry trail and road. People who are accustomed to a high stack-height may be more comfortable taking this shoe on technical, rocky terrain.

The seamless upper is extremely comfortable, with a roomy—but not overly so—toe box and an elasticized tongue for a dialed fit.

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**INOV-8
ROCLITE 305**

PRICE: \$130
WEIGHT: 10.6 OZ
DROP: 8 MM

The Roclite 305 is like an uber-grippy exoskeleton for your feet. The shoe is stiff, snug and prominently treaded, with a hardy midfoot rockplate and decent midsole cushion. The 6mm lugs perform admirably in even the slickest and stickiest mud, but thanks to their large surface area, they also track smoothly over harder surfaces.

Perhaps one of the shoe's most unique features: the tongue is not gusseted, but sewn directly into the upper, so that there is no layer of overlapping fabric, which enhances the shoe's form-fitting feel. The midfoot features a densely woven mesh reinforced with vertically oriented overlays, while the toe consists of a lighter, more flexible mesh.