

Running Times Trail Shoe Review, June 08

We're not in Kansas anymore, Toto, and yet this season is all about the ruby slippers. Or, rather, hot pink, Rio red, sweet orange, zinnia, marine, lemonade-denim, lime green, moonlight, mint, black plum, grey ice, aqua, azure, flash, cress green, and mint slippers. 2008 is the year of flashy shoe colors or, in many cases, flavors. As a letter responding to a recent Shoe Guy column observed, the perception of running in bright shoes can help to spur one on to a faster clip. While most road shoes are white and trail shoes had, until recently, been shades of gray, trail shoes are bucking that trend and are now a veritable rainbow. Color aside, the following review shows what is more than meets the eye.

adidas

www.shopadidas.com

adiStar Trail 3

SRP: \$120

W:

M:

adidas has one-upped itself by improving the adiStar Trail 2 with the Trail 3. It did so with a new seamless upper with microfiber, EVA insole, anti-slip woven lining to secure the foot through the full range of motion, an inlay of adiPrene 45 compound for comfort, durability, and odor control, improved outsole materials in high-wear areas, and enhanced traction. Although lighter and more aggressive, the Trail 3 retains its ForMotion technology, Torsion system, and cushioning inserts for agility on any surface. Our testers found that the third round of this shoe was a success thanks to a snug fit in the heel and midfoot and room in the toe box. The shoe ran nimbly and, other than the overbuilt heel, was pleasantly light with a smooth transition from heel to midfoot to toe-off.

Asics

www.asics.com

GEL Trail Attack 4

SRP: \$80

W:

M: 7-13, 14, 15

A perennial favorite, the Attack's fourth version is more of a shoe. It was a lightweight competition shoe and now it is a middleweight protective version of itself, offering more motion control than its predecessors. For example, its flared forefoot wards off lateral ankle sprains with accentuated stability and the Attack 4's forefoot base is 5mm wider than the Attack 3. For additional lateral support, the Attack 4's midfoot features a

molded “Trusstic”. Other modifications include more aggressive outsole lug patterns and a new lacing system for a more secure instep. As a carryover, the Attack retains its rear and forefoot GEL cushioning and Nylux forefoot plate for protection against bone bruising, all of which testers found combined for comfort but hindered some of the responsiveness and agility of previous versions of the shoe. The shoe felt great out of the box and was protective, had a roomy toe box and comfortable overall fit, although one tester found the attached tongue aggravated her instep.

GT- 2130 Trail

SRP: \$95 [check]

W:

M: 6-13, 14, 15, 16 [check]

An update to the 2120 Trail, using the same tooling as the GT-2120, with more aggressive trail-specific lugs and “Durasponge” outsole material for off-road surfaces. Our testers applauded “coddling” they received from the new cushy midsole material, which was modified by adding “Solyte” for compression resistance and weight savings. The GT 2130 also got accolades for its protectiveness, likely the result of a new partially-covered “Space Trusstic” for torsional rigidity yet without the potential for slipping caused if the midfoot plastic bridge were to land awkwardly on a rock. The upper features a trail-specific tooling of the GT 2130 to offer the smooth ride and comfortable fit of the prized road shoe. The upper also includes a full-length gusseted tongue to shield against dirt and small stones.

Brooks

Cascadia 3

SRP: \$

W: 6-11, 12 (D width)

M: 8-13, 14, 15 (B width)

Brooks has improved the popular Cascadia by using its new midsole compound MoGo for increased cushioning and energy return at a lighter weight. The shoe retains its generous cushioning through different rear and forefoot Hydroflows in cahoots with MoGo, stabilizing pivot posting in both the heel and forefoot, and protective qualities that resonated with our testers with the past two models. The “green” outsole – which is, in fact black – is a more durable compound that is made with silica for better wet and dry traction and more environmentally friendly than a more rubberized sole. Our testers recommended Cascadia 3 for trail runners seeking stability and cushioning, especially for long distances on rugged trails, without forfeiting performance. While it isn’t the shoe for light-on-their feet agility runners who favor a lower-profile ride, even they might reconsider the Cascadia for ultra-distances.

Five.Ten

SRP: \$110
M: 8-12, 13
(Unisex)

Marvel

Essentially, this is the same shoes as the 5.10 Genius, reviewed in the December issue, yet with a different, synthetic upper that offers more protection and support. Our testers recommended the Marvel for lightweight hiking interspersed with running or as an excellent approach shoe for rock climbers. They found the fit was “open” and the arch low, which was similar to the comments about the Genius, due to its flat footbed and roomy construction.

Hi-Tec

V-Lite Trail Eruption

SRP: 110
W: 5-10, 11
M: 7-12, 13

The Eruption’s “4-SYS” midsole uses eight densities of compression-molded EVA with a TPU shank to maximize the cushioning and support of this neutral shoe. For protection, there is a dispersion shield and a custom-designed Vibram outsole makes it clear that this is not a road shoe. One tester observed a “pleasant balance between comfort and rigidity” and appreciated the traction. The upper is reminiscent of Hi-Tec’s days of two decades past, when it was the leader in the then-emerging lightweight hiking shoe. The many overlays with synthetic materials and a moisture-wicking lining are a bit much for a running shoe, but the Eruption is sure to withstand plenty of abuse, especially given its TPU toecap. Besides, with the silver and gold highlights, they will be sure to stand out and, as one tester noted, “even encourage Hermes to take second notice.”

Inov-8

www.inov-8.com

Roelite 305

SRP: \$
W: 6.5-11
M: 5-13, 14

It is odd to think of 305 grams as being “substantial” but when you are talking about Inov-8, that is “getting up there.” The reason for the shift from super lightweight to just

lightweight is that the 305 comes with more protection and less raciness or what one tester characterized as that missing “race-flat” fit that you get from many of the lighter shoes offered by Inov-8. The shoe is good for longer and more severe trail runs, requiring less sure-footedness, although the RocLite is still a neutral shoe. It packs some real cushioning underfoot for harder, packed trails and uses Inov-8’s Fascia-band to help with propulsion while also providing push-through protection.

Lafuma

Sky Race OT

SRP: \$130

W: 5.5-10

M: 6-12.5

Lafuma has embraced the “Green” movement that is happily overrun the outdoor industry, using “OutDry” waterproofing with recycled materials that are PTFE-free. Without the use of seam-sealing tape, the OutDry system works by creating a larger volume of dry air between your foot and the waterproof barrier to reduce condensation while stabilizing a comfortable temperature. The shoes “ran” a little like light hikers and the Vibram custom outsole gave boot-like traction. The tri-density midsole helped to protect and guide the foot while maintaining a low profile for a “fast feeling” ride and the bright mesh upper with PU-reinforced toe provided plenty of protection. The upper got complicated by the overlapping padded, gusseted tongue and lace pocket and the confusion aggravated one tester by digging into his arch. Our testers commended Lafuma for its tactical “Twin Lace System” that uses two toggles to secure the forefoot and ankle collar separately.

LaSportiva

www.sportiva.com

CrossLite

SRP: \$85

M: 36-47.5

Built on a new racing last that feels like a fell-running shoe or even like a racing flat with an aggressive outsole with a spaced FriXion rubber lug pattern to shed mud. The mesh upper features a lower overlay lace cover to shield out debris, but that was seen as less than desirable by our testers one of whom “cut the lace protectors out seven miles into the new pair. I’d have cut them out after two miles, but my mother taught me not to run with scissors so I had to wait until the end of the run.” One tester praised the shoe as feeling light with “unsurpassed traction.” And another gave the dual-density midsole and nylon shank and rock guard high marks for provided protection while “performing well,

regardless of the surface, incline, or decline.” The only real complaint was the round laces that always came untied and the fact that the laces were hard to adjust and almost impossible to change out because of the lace cover.

Imogene

SRP: \$95

W: 36-43

M: 38-47.5

As a mid-weight trail shoe, the Imogene is consistent with prior La Sportiva shoes. It takes the cake as La Sportiva’s most cushioned trail running shoe, thanks to EVA inserts in the heel and forefoot, a shock-dampening material, and Nylon shank. The Imogene’s upper is made of an effectively-venting mesh and synthetic leather and the outsole feature’s La Sportiva’s FriXion rubber for utilitarian traction on rocky surfaces. The shoe was deemed a solid choice for the long haul, one that our testers said was nothing special but a reliable work horse for tough trails.

Mizuno

www.mizunousa.com

Wave Ascend 3

SRP: \$85

W:

M: 7-13, 14

This shoe was acknowledged as the best Ascend yet. As smooth and flexible as before, Mizuno reduced the heel height that had bothered testers in prior versions for a lower profile feel yet with road-feel-like cushioning. As one would expect from the Ascend, the transition from heel to toe is seamless and there is protection aplenty so that the shoe works just as well on roads as it does on rugged trails. Consistent with that assessment, our testers recommend the shoe for a wide variety of runners.

Montrail

www.montrail.com

Streak

SRP: \$90

W: 5-11

M: 7-13, 14, 15 [check]

Designed to be one of Montrail’s first shoes for all surfaces, including road, the Streak is diverse shoe that had an impressive fit. The neutral shoe’s midsole is responsive and

relatively low in profile while the forefoot shield protects the foot and, at the same time, disperses pressure from susceptible points. The outsole pattern provided noteworthy traction and Montrail's Gryptonite rubber was good enough to preserve the company's reputation for building some of the stickiest shoes in the business. Our testers felt the shoe was more akin to a light hiker than a specialty running shoe and that it lacked the "fit and fly" of Montrail's Vitesse or Masai.

New Balance

874

SRP: \$90

W: 5-11, 12, 13 (in widths B, D, and 2E)

M: 7-13, 14, 15 (in widths D, 2E, and 4E)

An update to last season's very successful 873, our testers did not judge the new shoe as improved. Not that it wasn't seen as a good shoe, it just wasn't given the favorable remarks of the original. Part of the reason for that is due to the way the new upper fits. It is made of two layers; an outer mesh that sits on top a more form-fitting liner that is intended to hold the foot more firmly in place but wasn't all that successful in practice. An Ortholite insert provides cushioning where it matters most, right up against the foot and, as with the 873, the 874 uses Abzorb and a protection plate to cushion and shield the foot while maintaining a lower profile for trail feel, albeit not as much feel as the original model. The 874 did get the nod for its new outsole and its ability to disperse shock to separate points while providing solid traction.

Nike

Air Zoom Trail S+

SRP: \$85

M: 6 – 13, 14, 15

Perhaps this shoe should have been called the Tupu 2 or, given that it accommodates the Nike+ iPod speed and distance monitor, perhaps the Tupu+? The shoe, to its credit, is essentially a new and improved version of one of Nike's best trail shoes. The Air Zoom Trail is everything a neutral, faster, forefoot trail runner wants in a shoe, and nothing else, really. Its sculpted midsole is low in profile and well cushioned – "bouncy" even – and protective, thanks to a Zoom-Air unit and a nylon stone shield in the forefoot, which testers found to be on the somewhat rigid end of the spectrum, given the shoes' otherwise nimble qualities. Nonetheless, it helped the Air Zoom Trail perform even better on rocky trails where underfoot protection comes as a bonus. Nike's waffled and serrated outsole with sticky rubber offered traction without jeopardizing the smooth turnover that you would normally have to get from a road shoe but felt heavy on the foot.

The North Face

Cooper's Hill

SRP: \$

W: 5-10, 11

M: 7-12, 13, 14

The North Face, known more for its ultra-distance trail shoes, decided to try something new and the Cooper's Hill is certainly that. Named after one of the more storied of UK hill races, the shoe is modeled after British fell running shoes, the Cooper's Hill is curve-lasted, moderately lightweight, rigid and aggressively soled. Unlike a fell shoe, the Cooper's Hill is made of relatively heavy materials, which makes it bomb-proof, using an abrasion-resistant upper with synthetic overlays and a burly "UltrATAC" outsole with mud-hungry lugs. Our testers agreed that they are the lightest shoe yet from The North Face but found them wanting for race-like feel, given the stiff ride and heavier feel, when compared to race shoes from other companies.

Rucky Chucky

SRP: \$

W: 5-10, 11

M: 7-12, 13, 14

Named for the river crossing at mile 78 of the Western States 100, the Rucky Chucky is designed for long-distance trail racing. With an amalgamation of midsole features that include a plastic suspension system that acts as a spring in the heel, a plastic "Snake Plate" in the forefoot for torsional stability and underfoot protection, a generous dose of TNF's proprietary cushioning compound in both the heel and forefoot and medial posting for motion control, the Rucky Chucky is well-endowed for the long haul. Our testers found it provided excellent traction on mud and snow and enjoyed the rigidity for edging on traverses, although less forgiving on harder surfaces and pavement where the protective qualities were outweighed by the lack of flex and substantial heft.

Fire Road

SRP: \$

W: 5-10, 11

M: 7-12, 13, 14

Sleeker than the Rucky Chucky but with some of its positive attributes, the Fire Road is – and we say this in a positive way – less protective and cushioned, yet ran more smoothly with considerable weight savings, even though it provided stability, a heel polymer crash pad, and a lightweight version of the Snake Plate for more flex while retaining bone-bruise protection. Our testers found that the Fire Trail was true to size and recommended

it for all-purpose training and versatile running on and off road, given their sturdiness and cushioning, although the midsole was too stiff for more than short stretches on pavement and the somewhat smooth outsole wasn't enough traction when real bite was necessary. The shallow and narrow heel cup detracted from ankle support and they took some miles to break in because they felt stiff out of the box.

Obōz

Ignition

SRP: \$100

W: 6-10, 11

M: 8-12, 13, 14

New to the market, Obōz (for "Outside Bozeman"), has hit the trails with a running start. Our testers were duly impressed with the newcomer's ability to do so well out of the gates, especially due to two features that are unusual for a start-up to get right with their entree. First, the Ignition's bootie construction was both snug for blocking out trail debris, yet the ankle collar's 3D Airmesh is stretchy and breathable enough so that it didn't hinder flexion. The second attribute was the Ignition's anatomical footbed that uses multiple densities for extra cushioning where it is needed most. The dual-density EVA midsole, forefoot cage and rather hard high-friction outsole was plenty protective but detracted a bit from the Ignition's trail feel because the ride felt rigid even though the forefoot flex was good.

Pearl Izumi

Peak XC

SRP: \$__

W: 5-11, 12

M: 7-13, 14

The Peak XC caused a bit of a debate amongst our testers: "This is essentially a lightweight road training or racing shoe" became the positive consensus while the normative position was disputed, given that some thought that a good thing and others a bad thing. The Peak is appropriately billed as a lightweight race performance shoe and it gets there with forefoot flex grooves, a minimal outsole, dual-density insole, superb cushioning, and very airy mesh seamless uppers. The benefit of extreme lightness and road-like heel-to-toe transitions come at a cost of a tender forefoot and that may be too high a toll for those prone to bone bruising or for really gnarly trails. Nevertheless, this is an exceptional racing flat for the trails and for trail dancers who run delicately enough that they needn't worry about underfoot protection, the Peak XC will be sure to please.

Salomon

www.salomonsports.com

XT Wings

SRP: \$120

W: 5.5-12

M: 7-13.5

The XT Wings successfully filled the void that had existed between its racing model, the SpeedCross 2, and the adventure running shoe, the XA Pro. Based on Salomon's new Agile Chassis System, the XT Wings are designed to work with the anatomy of your foot and its motion. The skeleton-like rear-foot stabilizer reduces lateral motion while the muscle of the shoe, the enhanced midsole, boasts greater durability than normal EVA. Finally Salomon's "contragrip" outsole materials serve as the tendons of the shoe, giving the XT Wings an energetic heel-to-toe energy transfer. All of this played out nicely for our testers, one of whom put them to the test at an adventure race in Australia. It got high marks for support, fit – due largely to the speed lacing – cushioning and traction on wet and dry surfaces. For improvements, the Wings could be a bit lighter for racing and our testers acknowledged that not everyone is a fan of speed lacing systems.

Saucony

ProGrid Xodus

SRP: \$100

W: 5-12

M: 7-13, 14, 15

This is the most aggressive of Saucony's new trio of trail shoes, launched this spring after several seasons away from the trails. Saucony's re-acquaintance with off-road surfaces was eased through a partnership with Vibram and a novel outsole compound and design. The Xodus was plenty burly, although relatively light for all that it offered, including cushioning features, rock protection, and stability. Our testers were impressed and recommend the Xodus for technical trails and longer runs, when protection and prolonged cushioning are more crucial. Although they found the Xodus somewhat responsive, they favored Saucony's other two shoes for faster running, especially when some pavement pounding was part of the mix.

ProGrid Guide TR

SRP: \$90

W: 5-12

M: 7-13, 14, 15

The Guide TR is more of a classic Saucony “trail” shoe in the sense that it ran smoothly on roads and off, offering a road-like feel and fitting really well, especially for our female testers who rejoiced over the snug upper, comfortable heel and adequate room for the forefoot. The Guide’s heel and forefoot cushioning flex grooves, underfoot bruise shield and unobtrusive medial posting for motion control combined for a stable and comfortable ride with a flowing heel-to-toe transition that struck a chord with our testers.

Altimeter

SRP: \$80

W: 5-11, 12

M: 7-13, 14

Saucony has finally entered the trail racing market with the Altimeter, it lightweight, flexible flier. With racing flat feel, the Altimeter is likely to be a top choice for mountain runners wanting to launch themselves up ascents while dancing their way on descents. Although the laces are too long and fall out of the pocket intended to contain them, they serve well to snug the shoe to the foot for a controlled fit. The simple EVA midsole provided low-profile trail feel yet was firm enough to protect against bone bruising and the slightly wrapped, aggressively-lugged Vibram outsole gave the shoe spike-like traction yet didn’t hold the shoe back when it came running smoothly on pavement.

Vasque

www.vasque.com

Aether Tech SS

SRP: \$120

W: 5-11

M: 7-12, 13, 14, 15

Basically, this is a soft-shell version of the Aether Tech, reviewed in the December 2007 issue. It remains a lightweight, protective shoe but now features a low-stretch weather-resistant upper that is reinforced with welded TPU and accentuated with a partially-recycled PU nubuck. Testers were drawn to the utilitarian Boa lacing system and some even figured out how it can be customized to accommodate different instep shapes, although that wasn’t obvious enough as others missed that element.

Check out the [Trailrunner Gear Store](#)