

A JOGGER'S BEST ALLY IS A SHOE THAT KEEPS PACE WITH HIS INDIVIDUAL NEEDS. HERE, WE GIVE 10 TOP SNEAKERS THE RUNAROUND. BY JEFFREY RICH

NING MATES

◁ **BEST FOR HIGH OR WEAK ARCHES**

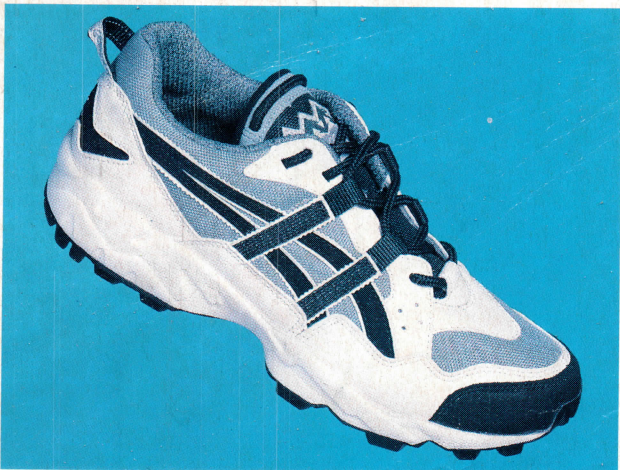
Nike Tailwind II (13.4 ounces, \$120)

The Shoe: Marry a narrowish sole to a close-fitting upper: The result is superior arch support. It's an unusually buoyant shoe as well. As the name implies, jogging in these feels like riding the jet stream. An Air pillow under the ball of the foot makes the shoe extra springy—and quick enough that even the slowest runner could outpace Daniel Komen. Okay, maybe not.

Bonus Points: The killer cushioning system doesn't bulk up the weight.

Stumbling Block: The NYC Department of Correction recently banned Nike Airs—inmates were storing contraband in the shoe's hollowed-out chamber.

Bottom Line: Combining speed and support, the Tailwind II is a winning choice for anyone (except the incarcerated) looking for arch support.



BEST FOR OFF-ROAD RUNNING

Asics GEL-Extreme (11.5 ounces, \$75)

The Shoe: Although you'd think a shoe built for off-road training would be a porker, the GEL-Extreme is surprisingly light. What's behind its high-endurance beefiness? Three features: a very firm midsole (the zone between the inside lining and the outer sole); a reinforced toe box (in case you kick a boulder); and a knobby carbon outsole that grips the most slippery rocks.

Bonus Points: Highly reinforced outers help keep feet warm in cold weather.

Stumbling Block: Upper rises too low to let it double as a good hiking shoe.

Bottom Line: For runners who have the chance (not to mention the brains) to train away from concrete, this is the traction-action star.

IT'S TOUGH CHOOSING a running shoe. Fit is always crucial, durability a must. But what about kickass design? It depends on you: If you're a hardcore runner who doesn't mind appearing in public with tiny shorts, skinny arms, and one of those stupid-looking Breathe Rite strips on your nose, ugly shoes may not bug you at all. (And let's face it: If a shoe helps you run a sub-three marathon, it could be made of recycled condoms and you'd wear it.) Most guys, however, just want a good, dependable shoe, and if it happens to have some of those little transparent plastic windows reminiscent of the submarine in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*—hey, cool.

So here's where it gets tricky: What makes a good shoe good? In short, its ability to accommodate your unique needs. Factors to consider include:

▶ **YOUR FOOT FLAWS:** Do you have high arches, freakishly wide feet, or the very common heel structure that makes you a "pronator" (i.e. when you run, your foot rolls inward)? (See box on page 139.)

▶ **WHERE YOU RUN:** Do you typically pound the pavement, a treadmill, or a rugged off-road path?

▶ **OTHER FACTORS:** What's your weight, your budget, and your relative need to impress any beautiful women who just happen to be positioned at ground-level?

Whether you're Pronator Pete, Low-Arch Archie, or Flat-foot Frank, here are MAXIM's best bets. (Note: All shoe weights are for size 9 1/2.)



BEST FOR BARGAIN PERFORMANCE

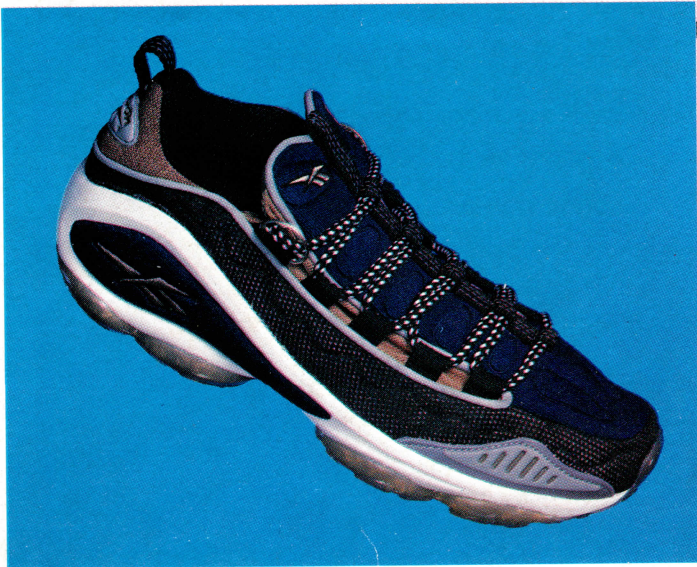
Nike Airmax Triax (13.8 ounces, \$89)

The Shoe: Normally if you're shopping on a shoestring, you can't expect to snag a sneaker with performance cushioning. The Triax, however, has Nike's signature Air pillow in the heel, which means a buoyant yet stable strike at a reasonable price. Though it lacks the bells and whistles of higher-end Nikes (dual-density soles and extra Air pillows), the sneaker barely suffers.

Bonus Points: Limits your contribution to the Phil Knight Auxiliary Fund.

Stumbling Block: With no motion-control feature, a bad choice for heavy pronators.

Bottom Line: Simple yet solid: superior value for your buck.



BEST FOR THE TREADMILL

Reebok DMX (12.5 ounces, \$110)

The Shoe: On a bleak, rainy Sunday, nothin' beats the treadmill. Go to the gym, jump on the machine, then run for hours while you watch Barry Sanders do the same. Of course, some guys use the machine year round, and for them, the DMX is our rat-race shoe of choice. Ten interconnecting air chambers in the sole create pleasant cushioning against the treadmill's stiff surface, and—by controlling your gait—let you exploit the machine to perfect your stride. Jackie Chan-esque bounce combats boredom.

Bonus Points: The innovative sole design actually works.

Stumbling Block: The sneaker's heel area could be a bit stiffer; it's the Achilles heel of the sole design.

Bottom Line: Technology that works—especially indoors.



BEST FOR BIG GUYS

New Balance 586 (14.8 ounces, \$99.95)

The Shoe: The Harley of running shoes. The back of the shoe is as stiff and stable as a monster highway hog. The rugged carbon-rubber outsole and the elongated graphite Rollbar—a reinforcement embedded under the heel to counter pronation—will support even Clinton-sized joggers (with or without fries).

Bonus Points: Softness up front means it's quick off the toe. Could give Godzilla the impression he's a cheetah.

Stumbling Block: The material's weave doesn't breathe as well as some, so a bit warm for noontime summer runs.

Bottom Line: Flexibility in a stiff ride. If the Hell's Angels had a track club, this would be its official sneaker.



BEST FOR WIDE FEET

Saucony GRID Dual (13.1 ounces, \$90)

The Shoe: The widest running sneaker that most stores stock (the D width version of the GRID equals an E or EE in other models). Plus: The GRID heel insert—a carbon-graphite-fiber structure resembling the strings of a tennis racquet—serves as a mini-trampoline to give the shoe extra rebound and shock absorbency. Special air chambers under the foot reduce road vibrations.

Bonus Points: Big guys will like the support of the beefy heel cup.

Stumbling Block: The beefy heel cup tends to pile weight on the shoe.

Bottom Line: Buoyant yet stable. If you have six toes, this shoe's for you. Guys with narrower feet will swim in it.



BEST FOR CONCRETE

Brooks Beast (15.1 ounces, \$95)

The Shoe: A unique crumple-zone shock absorber in the heel does its level best to make a grimy, garbage-strewn street or sidewalk feel like a valley of marshmallows. A steadying dual-density midsole and anti-pronation inserts keep the foot firm and steady.

Bonus Points: Its off-set laces can accommodate both high and low insteps in style.

Stumbling Block: Though stable as an ox, this is one stiff Beast. If you like a more supple shoe, you may feel petrified in its vise-like grip.

Bottom Line: Steadfast cushioning for urban warriors who want to pound the pavement without taking a pounding.