

## • RUNNING



# It's a shoe-in

Magandeep Singh on picking up the right pair for running

### AFTER HAVING ADVISED

you on the basics of running before we even had our shoes on, it's time to address the running part. Let's get to the most important thing: your shoes. As with all aspects of life, here too exist different camps. The first division is based on whether you are a barefoot runner or not.

Barefoot runners are like the hippies of the running world, the rebels who think that humans were made without shoes and, so, that is exactly how they should run (Abebe Bikila, the greatest marathoner of all time, broke his first Olympic record in Rome in 1960 running barefoot). The other school believes

that running without shoes happened because people like Bikila, who could not afford shoes when growing up, got used to running barefoot. If they had been provided with shoes when young, they would have preferred to wrap their feet in something scientifically and ergonomically designed for the purpose.

Barefoot runners, if they ever wear shoes, prefer the type that are flat and have minimal heel to toe drop, i.e. the height of the shoe at the back is almost equal to the height in the front, thus keeping the foot flat upon impact. Barefoot runners will prefer shoes with the least amount of cushioning and support, as they find it constricting. If you have ever seen someone running with those odd shoes that have all the toes individually cut out, then you have been acquainted with their tribe. Those are by Vibrams, but others like the Nike Free are also great choices to try out. I personally am not a barefoot runner and find the stress too much, with higher chances of injury. I have tried



Clockwise from above:  
Puma Faas 500 V4;  
Adidas's Ultra Boost;  
Reebok One;  
Nike Road Racing;  
Skechers GoRun

minimalist pairs, and though I do feel they make me go faster, on the whole I end up feeling more worn out and need a longer period to recover for future sorties.

Then you have the other camp, the one which not only prefers shoes but further divides up people into two categories, the neutral (whose feet land flat on the ground), and those who either land on the outer edge of their feet (under-

pronators or UP) or fall inwards onto their arch (over-pronators or OP). By observing the soles of your shoes, you can see by the general wear as to your default stance. Trouble is, I find that (a) you don't necessarily walk like you run and (b) over time and with different shoes, your stance changes. But, it is always a good idea to have yourself checked for your landing and to buy shoes accordingly. Generally speaking, people with flat feet or a low arch over-pronate, whereas a high arch is more susceptible to under-pronation. Most brands realise this natural deformity and have shoes for all types in their range.

Cushioning is an important aspect of the shoe. The more you have, the softer the impact, but then it slows you down as the energy on impact is absorbed and dissipated in order to reduce stress, which then means a little less spring when you toe-off. Some shoes rely on gels, while others use foam for cushioning, and the latter is generally slightly stiffer.



So, if you are a seasoned runner, you may prefer shoes with less cushioning but more energy transference, whereas debutants should opt for shoes with ample cushioning. As cushioning gets heavier, the heel-to-toe drop also increases, ranging from 4-6 mm to as much as 12 mm.

Given all these permutations and combinations, choosing a pair of shoes can be tough. I say buy two; always have more than one pair (practice and race-day pairs) and get comfy in them. Of course, you can get by with just one pair, but variety sometimes helps kill running ennui.

Reebok, since its revamp (with the new Delta logo) has launched some very good shoes, and I highly recommend the Reebok One series (Cushion for UP, Guide for OP). Nike recently launched the Elite 7, but it sits a bit snug on the mid-foot and, although I ran a full marathon in them, I wasn't very chuffed. Their Road Racing shoe remains the most spectacular shoe to date — light and zippy- fast. Adidas's new Ultra Boost range is another great shoe, where much effort has been made to make the mid-sold soft, but not very soft. And if you are a Puma fan, try out the new Faas 500 V4. It is incredibly lightweight.

For now, get out there and acquire a pair of shoes. Go and try the shoes in a store first. The best ones usually have treadmills to let you simulate ideal running conditions and gauge comfort.