

**E**ver since Eliud Kipchoge broke the two-hour marathon barrier in October 2019 wearing a prototype of Nike's Air Zoom Alphafly NEXT% – a trainer built with carbon fibre plates to boost stability and propulsion – the race to create the fastest running shoe in the world has been gathering pace. Fast forward to 2021, you'll be hard pushed to find any running brand that doesn't feature (or isn't about to launch) a carbon-plated shoe in its range. But the recent game-changing developments in footwear design don't stop at shaving a few seconds off your PB.

'Carbon plates, and experimenting with shoe geometry, shoe drops and midsole thickness, are only a few innovative techniques being currently utilised by brands to develop the lightest, most "technical" running shoe possible, without compromising its structure in holding the foot in place or impairing overall comfort perception of the runner,' says Anna Kosciuk, a sports scientist on NURVV's Biomechanics team (nurvv.com). 'And while some advancements are driven by the need for constant innovation for the marketing and sales of footwear brands, many are the result of a willingness to help runners unlock their true potential.'

Energy-returning cushioning, stability-boosting ergonomics and power-increasing soles equal measurable performance benefits for experienced runners and newbies alike, allowing you to go the distance for longer with less risk of injury. But with so many types of trainer to choose from, how can you find the right runner for your needs? Read on to discover the perfect shoe for you.

# THE PERFECT FIT

Whether you're pounding the pavements or hitting the trails, our guide will help you find the right running shoe for you

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PHOTOGRAPHY: Getty Images

## 3 of the best ... ROAD SHOES



**ADIDAS ULTRABOOST 21**  
£160; [adidas.co.uk](https://adidas.co.uk)

With a new silhouette and exaggerated heel curve, this update packs six per cent more 'Boost' than its predecessor for amazing energy return, while the redesigned torsion system (a lightweight bridge between the forefoot and heel) provides a 15 per cent increase in forefoot bending stiffness for a more responsive ride.



**NIKE AIR ZOOM TEMPO NEXT%**  
£169.95; [nike.com](https://nike.com)

Taking design principals from Nike's Zoom Alphafly NEXT% – including visible Air Pods for responsive cushioning and a sensation of propulsion – this durable shoe is built like a racer but made for daily use. The stability-enhancing plate shifts from carbon to a composite – softer for added comfort over mileage.



**UA HOVR MACHINA 2**  
£140; [underarmour.com](https://underarmour.com)

Balancing responsiveness and 20 per cent more cushioning in a lightweight package, this shoe has a fast, snappy feel due to the carbon-filled propulsion plates, yet still provides the comfort of a long-distance trainer. Real-time Foam Coaching via the MapMyRun app now gives insight into foot strike angle.

## 3 of the best ... STABILITY SHOES



**361 STRATA 4**  
£134.99; [361europe.com](https://361europe.com)

This newly upgraded mid- to high-mileage trainer delivers a comfy and supportive ride mile after mile, thanks to the super stable platform which provides both medial and lateral foot support. Available in regular and wide widths, the midsole has been re-engineered to provide even greater rebound, cushioning and responsiveness.



**ASICS GEL-NIMBUS 23**  
£155; [asics.com](https://asics.com)

The 23rd edition of this neutral long-distance shoe introduces gender-specific features (including 3mm of added height in the heel of female runners) for tailored support, enhanced protection and improved impact absorption via the lightweight, cushioned midsole. The softer mesh upper ensures flexibility and breathability.



**NEW BALANCE FRESH FOAM 860V11**  
£120; [newbalance.co.uk](https://newbalance.co.uk)

Engineered with a bit of asymmetry and extra firmness in the midsole, this shoe has a 3D moulded heel for precision comfort and fit. The improved energy-returning soles are extra responsive for increased stability and confidence on the road.



## 3 of the best ... RACING SHOES



### ON CLOUDBOOM

£170; [on-running.com](http://on-running.com)

An elite-level competition shoe engineered for distances up to a marathon, this agile and super-lightweight (185g) trainer features a carbon-infused speedboard for serious explosivity and pace without compromising on cushioning. The extreme rocker-shape sole provides incredible propulsive power.



### SAUCONY ENDORPHIN PRO

£190; [saucony.com](http://saucony.com)

Weighing in at a mere 179g, this is the 'fastest shoe Saucony has ever built'. The signature S-curve carbon-fibre plate and Speedroll technology work together to propel you forwards, providing a lovely toe-off that promotes the feeling of continuous movement so running at top speed feels easier than ever.



### HOKA ONE ONE CARBON X 2

£160; [hokaoneone.eu](http://hokaoneone.eu)

For a shoe that offers stability and speed, look no further than HOKA's carbon-plated update: the Carbon X 2. Plush foam teamed with a farther-from-the-foot carbon plate offers ample energy return and a soft feel on footfall. The dovetail design downsizes energy absorption in the heel, which is great news for heel strikers.

## 3 of the best ... TRAIL SHOES



### THE NORTH FACE FLIGHT SERIES VECTIV

£180; [thenorthface.co.uk](http://thenorthface.co.uk)

Combining a 3D carbon-fibre footplate with a rocking midsole for multi-directional stability and forward propulsion, these lightweight shoes promise shock-absorbing comfort over rough terrain. With reinforced toes, they claim to reduce downhill tibial (shin) impact by 10 per cent.



### SALOMON SENSE RIDE 4

£110; [salomon.com](http://salomon.com)

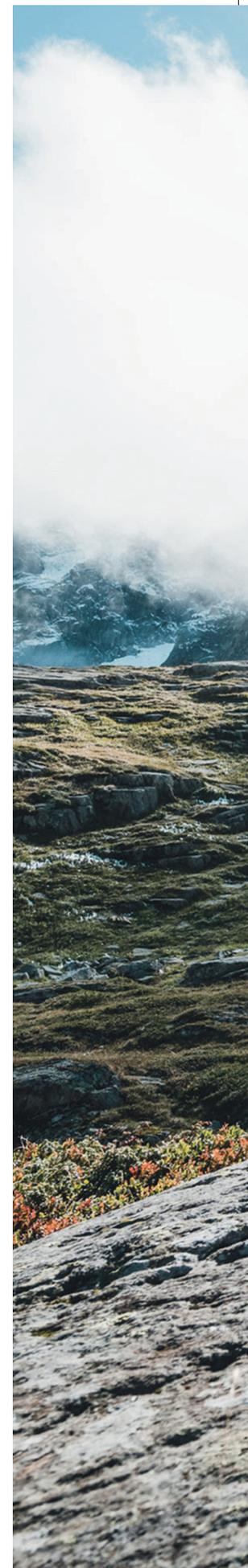
This update on a classic has a more durable, breathable upper and features Optivibe cushioning, which absorbs vibrations and decreases muscle fatigue. The re-designed heel collar has more padding to improve heel hold, while the Profeel film protects your feet from sharp objects.



### BROOKS CATAMOUNT

£140; [brooksrunning.com](http://brooksrunning.com)

Built for speed, this neutral shoe has a lightweight, adaptive DNA Flash midsole infused with nitrogen for a responsive, springy, nimble experience on the trails. High surface-area lugs and a sticky rubber sole provide amazing uphill and downhill traction, while the Ballistic Rock Shield protects feet from rocks and roots.



# 2021 running trends

## AUDIO WORKOUTS

Music and podcasts are set to be replaced by audio workouts as the new in-ear running buddy of choice. Check out platforms such as Auro (auro.fit) and WithU (withutraining.com) for guided running sessions and training plans led by motivational coaches, often set to synchronised music tempos for maximum results.

## VIRTUAL EVENTS

Virtual races will continue to bring fun, focus and competitiveness to running, with more people than ever set to compete on their own during these socially distanced, digital times. Ultra marathons (those over 26.2 miles) will prove especially popular in 2021 as runners strive to push themselves even further or raise money for charity via extreme challenges.

## REMOTE COACHING

Can't get to your running club but want a personalised training approach? With the help of wearable tech to track your running metrics, coaches can analyse your every step remotely to assess your strengths and weaknesses, provide expert advice and training plans via Skype, phone and email, and help you reach your goals.

## AT-HOME SHOPPING TIPS

**Next time you buy your running shoes online, try these tips from Ashley Scott, technical representative supervisor at Brooks Running (brooksrunning.com).**

● 'You land with one-and-a-half to three times your bodyweight when running, meaning your feet splay considerably (and swell due to increased blood flow and heat), so most runners need to order a half to a full size bigger than regular shoes. As a

guideline, grab your comfiest trainers and see how they fit. Ideally, you want about a half to a full thumb's width between your longest toe and the end of the shoe, so scale up accordingly.'

● 'To find out if you need a support or neutral shoe, use an online tool such as Brooks Shoe Finder (brooksrunning.com/en\_gb/ShoeFinder), which will take you through a questionnaire and some simple exercises to help establish your required level of

support and recommend a type of shoe. Guessing by your high or low arches doesn't always work.'

● 'Knowing whether you need a wider or narrower fitting comes down to experience. Many brands now offer long trial periods for purchases through their online stores, including Brooks which offers a 90-day Run Happy Promise. If your shoes aren't the perfect match, return them and try another style.' 