

# Marathon lightweights

Thinking of a last-minute switch to racing flats for the London Marathon? Here's some ideas from PAUL LARKINS



Above: Brooks T6 Racer

THOSE of you running this year's Virgin London Marathon don't want to be leaving it much longer if you are considering buying a new pair of racing shoes as you'll need time to get used to them. So with five weeks to go until the big day, we've taken a look at a selection of some of the racing shoes on the market.

We have to be slightly politically incorrect here when we talk about racing shoes in that, as light and responsive as they undoubtedly are, they aren't for everyone. Consider one or two important facts when you think about investing in a pair – if you are a heavier type of runner these aren't for you; if you are looking for a time slower than three hours then comfort and cushioning will pay dividends rather than a stripped down pair. So take a look at the following selection.

■ **Brooks T6 Racer**  
172g/6.1oz

RESPONSIVE, light and very flexible are just a selection of the praises given to this very good shoe from Brooks. It has tested well with our team over the last few months and, while we can't promise great race times, the shoe is a model to consider if you are a lighter runner looking for a fast time. It provides a softer feel

than some shoes, so perhaps you might consider that as a negative when getting ready for the marathon, but for distances up to that, it's pretty much perfect. "I loved the response it provided and the way you can get up on your toes," enthused one tester. In terms of fit, the slightly curved last does feel a tad narrow for some runners, but essentially the toe box is roomy enough and your heel will feel well supported. As a racing shoe, traction isn't the best, but this is also the type of shoe in which you may want to run some fast spring road races and not in muddy conditions.

Interestingly, Brooks advise that as the shoe is a very lightweight, minimal-support racing flat, the vast majority of runners will not find it "enough shoe" for a full marathon. If you have a light frame and a biomechanically efficient stride, however, you may be able to get away with it. We suggest you work up to it in several half marathon-plus races beforehand to see how it works for you before trying for the full classic distance.

■ **Cost:** £49.99

■ **New Balance RC130**  
140g/4.9oz

THE words "ultralight" are written on these shoes and they describe perfectly what you are getting. For a select few that will mean perfection and indeed these amazingly light shoes deliver all you can expect in that department. They are the kind of shoe you visualise on the feet of the Olympic marathon winner in intolerably hot conditions, breathable and something you barely notice on your feet. However, be warned – if you are a slower, heavier runner these just cannot offer what you require.

getting used to as they are so light and the wear could be an issue (although it wasn't for us).

Basically then, a few lucky readers will understand the importance of this shoe whereas more "normal" paced runners among us may prefer a slightly more cushioned shoe.

■ **Cost:** £50



Left: New Balance RC130 ultralight racer

■ **Brooks Green Silence**  
195g/6.9oz

THIS is an interesting shoe, which certainly will appeal to many, as essentially it's a shoe constructed from recycled materials. Brooks say: "Constructed with roughly half as many parts as comparable shoes, the Green Silence requires less petroleum and energy to make."

Let's start with the positives: the materials used, for some, may feel a little soft and sponge-like and some will like that, but for out-and-out speed that feel often doesn't work. However, if you are looking for an ultra-cushioned shoe then maybe this is for you. Other plus points include a roomy toe box, but our test team did feel these shoes didn't offer enough protection for a long run. So you can see we have a plus and minus shoe here. The ride is comfortable and the shoe is very flexible and light. However, as our tester said: "It is way too soft for pushing the pace in sessions as the shoe absorbs most of the effort put in." The tester did think that the traction was

All the positives in terms of a low-ride, hard feel, great flexibility, no weight and narrow fit will all be negatives for anybody not looking to run world-record pace in the marathon! That said, these are wonderful shoes to consider for a track 10,000m or a fast summer road 5km. They do take some



Above: Brooks Green Silence is a fully biodegradable shoe in a distinctive design

fine but that perhaps the shoe wouldn't last too long. But to date, the shoe is still going strong on his runs. The key green features include: the world's first-ever biodegradable midsole for running shoes; 75 per cent of the shoe's materials are post-consumer recycled;



Above: Saucony Fastwitch 4 offers support and cushioning

■ **Mizuno Musha**  
230g/8.1oz

biodegradable insole and collar foam; laces, gillies and reinforced webbing are 100 per cent post-consumer recycled; water-based adhesives are used throughout; dyes and colorants are non-toxic; packaging is 100 per cent post-consumer recycled.

■ **Cost:** £49.99

■ **Saucony Fastwitch 4**  
170g/6oz

THIS is a well-cushioned shoe that encouragingly offers an acceptable amount of support. By that we don't mean it's a heavy, support shoe, rather it's a shoe that understands what a racer requires in terms of lightness, response, cushioning and pronation support.

Our test team were quick to point out that this shoe would be suitable for longer races and how good the fit was along with the general well cushioned feel which would be acceptable for anything on the road. The general feedback was also good.

The bottom line for these shoes was that they were suitable for all distances and provide great comfort when racing. You can't say much more than that can you?

■ **Cost:** £64.99

THOUGH well cushioned with not too much in the way of support, our testers did feel they could cope with the longer races. Part of this is down to the cushioning, which is good in both heel and forefoot.

However, it is worth stressing they are definitely for a neutral-style runner who isn't looking for too much (if anything) in the way of support. The last is fairly straight, which does mean you're encouraged to get up on your toes, which, after all, is what racing is all about.

Unusually, for a Japanese manufacturer, these are also slightly heavier than other racing shoes Mizuno have featured in the past. On the whole, it is light and flexible, with a very responsive forefoot with a good lightweight mesh upper that is certainly non-sock friendly, making it a fine shoe out of transition.

■ **Cost:** £60



Left: Mizuno Musha is flexible and responsive

Right: Newton Gravity Trainer gets you up on your toes

■ **Sportz Gel**

WITH the Virgin London Marathon drawing ever nearer you need to make sure that the 26 miles will be as trouble-free as possible. How frustrating it can be that your fitness is not in question, but a blister or a friction rash slows you down and leaves you distraught with your performance? Of course, it's not just in races, but in training also where you can get soreness caused by the friction of sweaty clothes rubbing against the skin and these can be extremely uncomfortable.

A new product called Sportz Gel, which is a lubricating soft gel can help to prevent such malaises. It has been developed from the successful 'Surf Gel' which surfers have been using to prevent wetsuit rash and will be suitable for runners in particular. It is completely unscented and is water, heat and wind resistant which enables it to stay on the skin longer and it can also help to heal any chafing as well.



Sportz Gel gives you a trouble-free run

It can also be used to relieve chapped lips and cracked skin, enabling the healing process to begin. Sportz Gel comes in a handy 49gm mess-free applicator which allows the product to be applied where it's needed without getting your hands messed up. It can be applied to all those troublesome areas such as neck, underarm, chest, thighs, feet, between the toes and is particularly useful for the runner's chagrin, 'joggers nipple'.

Available in sports shops or order direct from [www.thainleisure.com](http://www.thainleisure.com) and priced at £7.95.

■ **Newton Gravity Trainer**  
266g/9.4oz

IF YOU haven't tried Newton shoes before, they are like no others. They are designed primarily to get you up on your toes, without thinking about it! The Newton team are mainly triathletes and from an athletic point-of-view they wouldn't wear inferior shoes after doing a swim and a bike and they certainly want to finish well in the run section. The Gravity is a neutral trainer that performs equally well in races and the mechanics of the shoe try to mimic as closely as possible barefoot running. Our tester tried them out with two 10 minute runs to begin with and agreed with the promotional literature that says it makes it awkward to do a traditional heel strike while running. The rubber "actuator" lugs are

designed to act as the primary cushion on impact, and then as a lever to propel the body into the next stride. They will take a while to get accustomed to as they have a totally different feel to any other shoe and some will find calf soreness initially. The tester mentioned that they felt better on a run than when he wore them for a shopping trip and also thought they would be better for races up to 10km and faster-paced sessions.

The consensus is to go to an expert retailer to get a running gait test and try them out for a good 10 minutes to get the feel of them (you will quickly know if they are for you). The overall comfort and mesh design was deemed good for racing although on dirt trails some grit may get into the sockliner. They don't come cheap and are not for everyone, but you may be surprised at how they can change your running gait.

■ **Cost:** £110

