

FITNESS FANATICS

Apple of their eyes

Premier triathletes are lining up to endorse 'the Newton' shoe

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Paula Newby-Fraser could not run. The pain in her right ankle was excruciating.

"It was just so painful to land and toe off," said Newby-Fraser, remembering a 1993 stress fracture. "I'd end up limping and having to stop or my whole leg would have buckled."

A local orthopedist told Newby-Fraser she wouldn't run at a world-class level again, that the injury was career-ending.

While Newby-Fraser was doing some cycling and swimming in Boulder, Colo., late that summer, a friend suggested she visit a guy who owned a running store and specialized in making orthotics.

Danny Abshire took a look at Newby-Fraser's foot, created an orthotic and after five weeks of running, Newby-Fraser won the sixth of her eight Ironman Hawaii titles.

Of Abshire, Newby-Fraser said, "He's sort of single-handedly responsible for saving my career."

Fourteen years later, Newby-Fraser is again showing her faith in Abshire. The Encinitas resident is one of the early investors in a running shoe Abshire helped create, a shoe many in the triathlon community are calling revolutionary.

The Newton, which took more than 11 years to develop, features technology that enables runners to land more naturally on their midfoot or forefoot, which many coaches believe is a key to running faster.

Outwardly, the shoe's most distinctive features are four vertical rubber strips beneath the forefoot. The strips help cushion a runner's landing.

Additionally, said Abshire, technology beneath the strips helps store and retrieve energy, propelling the runner forward.

The shoe is named Newton because it reflects Sir Isaac Newton's third law of motion: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."

"It kind of promotes running like a wheel as opposed to striking with the heel and running like a tripod," said Abshire.



CRISSY PASCUAL / Union-Tribune

Triathletes Heather Fuhr (left), Michellie Jones and Paula Newby-Fraser endorse new shoe.

The shoe, which will retail for \$155, is not yet available to runners. Beginning March 27, customers will be able to log on to [www.newtonrunning.com](http://www.newtonrunning.com) and place orders.

Initially, the shoe will not be for sale at stores, only online.

"It's a definite strategy," Abshire said. "We're creating a demand for the shoe."

At first, Newton is focusing on the triathlon market. Among triathletes endorsing the shoes: Newby-Fraser, Carlsbad's Michellie Jones, Encinitas' Heather Fuhr and Switzerland's Natascha Badmann. Among them, the women own 15 Ironman Hawaii titles.

"I love how they put you more on your forefoot, and I think they're really responsive," said Jones, last year's Hawaii champion. "The first day I ran in them, I was like, 'Wow!' I actually ran too hard. They make you want to run hard."

Asked if the fact she's paid to wear the shoes influenced her comments, Jones said, "I would never endorse anything that I don't believe in."

Abshire, who has designed orthotics for 10 Ironman Hawaii winners, said Newton is targeting the triathlon community for a number of reasons.

"They're early adapters," Abshire said. "They see a technology and they want to buy it."

Plus, triathlon offers a smaller target base than general runners, and initially Newton is producing just 7,000 shoes. The goal is to sell 50,000 the first year.



“We want to concentrate on the quality of the product,” Abshire said, “and we’re not concerned with producing high numbers at the moment.”

People will be able to sample the shoes at the Ford Ironman 70.3 California Expo, March 29-31 in Oceanside.

Seventy-five triathletes who participated in multisports.com training camps last month in San Diego County and Tempe, Ariz., were introduced to the shoes.

Andrew Block, an Ironman veteran from Encinitas, came away impressed.

“If you just jog or walk, they’re just OK,” Block said. “But if you run, I would say the shoes make you run faster. I don’t know whether it’s the shoes, the position it puts you in, how you take off after striking down. Something about it just works.”

Block said he particularly noticed a difference running uphill.

“It’s almost like digging your toes in the hill,” Block said. “Maybe it has something to do with the fact you’re already on your toes, this just accentuates it and you just fly. It’s creepy.”

Block may have paid Newton the ultimate compliment, saying, “I bet in two years you’ll see the company bought out or somebody comes out quicker than you think with something similar. Then you’ll see the lawsuits coming.”

The shoe is very light and bright. A men’s size 9 in the trainer weighs 10 ounces. A typical trainer weighs 12 ounces. With an assist from Abshire’s wife, color schemes come in combinations of lime, red, yellow, orange and white.

As for Newton starting small, producing a limited number of shoes and initially focusing on the triathlon world, Abshire said, “We want to be the Porsche of running shoes is what it comes down to. You don’t see Porsches everywhere.”

