

happy feet

A revolution in running-shoe technology proves that when it comes to cushion and support, less is more.


BARE NECESSITIES

FROM FAR LEFT: The Newton Gravity, \$175; newtonrunning.com; the Ecco Biom, \$195; eccousa.com; and Karhu's M3, \$110; karhu.com.

After decades of reliance on the cushion-and-support model, running-shoe makers are completely reinventing the way people hit the pavement. If your old shoes swathed your feet in static stability on top of cloudlike comfort, the new thinking lets the 26 bones, 32 muscles and tendons, and 107 ligaments of each foot carry their own weight. These shoes keep you on your toes, literally, and simulate (to varying degrees) **barefoot running**. When your feet are free to do what they've evolved to do, the theory goes, you'll be both faster and less prone to injury.

Take Ecco's new Biom shoes. They sit lower to the ground and flex much more in the forefoot, in all directions, than anything I've felt before. Even walking around the house in them took some getting used to; out on the road, though, the rounded heel eases you into a smoother, faster landing—farther forward than you're likely used to.

Similarly, the shoes from Newton Running are meant to imitate the workings of the naked foot. Lacing them up for the first time, I was surprised (in a good way) to have so much wiggle room up front—and because their four metatarsal-like “actuator lugs” protrude from the sole, they touch down

before the rest of the shoe, throwing you to the wind with each strike. Built for speed? Newtons actually feel better while you're running than while you're standing.

Karhu, the Finnish brand worn by the legendary “Flying Finn,” Paavo Nurmi—he of nine Olympic golds and dozens of world records in the 1920s and '30s—seems to have been cursed by bad karma: It introduced the world's first air-cushioned shoe in 1976 but was outmarketed by Nike Air; two decades earlier, Karhu's owner sold rights to the company's three-stripe logo to a little German outfit called Adidas for two bottles of schnapps and a few bucks. But Karhu's relaunched line will minimize the time your heel spends on the ground and propel you ahead while safeguarding your foot's natural roll. And there's the weight factor: like a feather.

A quick word about comfort and change: These shoes will make you aware of a few, or a few dozen, muscles you didn't know you had, so ease into them. (If you've ever run shoeless on the beach, you'll recognize the hurt.) Shorten your stride and lean forward a bit more—it comes in handy when you're breaking tape at the finish line.

—COREY SEYMOUR

regimen >100