



01

RUNNING COSTS

—Colorado

Preface

'Forefoot striking' is the style of most professional runners – so why do the big brands all emphasise the heel? A tiny trainer company in Colorado is proving that the big boys need to stay on their toes when it comes to new sport technology.

WRITER

Ann Marie Gardner

PHOTOGRAPHER

Poppy de Villeneuve



02

- 01 Newton Running's co-founder Danny Abshire
- 02 Different styles of Newton trainers
- 03 Newtonwear at Active Imprints

Newton Running is a relatively unknown running shoe brand that might just be one of the most exciting and inspirational launches in years. Over 5,000 pairs of shoes (at \$175/€130 a pair) were sold in the first four months – this from a company that makes its product available only through trade and athletic shows, on the internet and at one shop (owned by one of the founders) in Boulder, Colorado.

In the billion-dollar sports footwear business, Newton Running is a David and Goliath story. Based in Boulder, co-founders and elite runners Jerry Lee and Danny Abshire spent 13 years finessing their patented technology for a running shoe that mimics running barefoot – typically a 30 per cent more efficient way to run. Newton's technology relies on simple physics. Remember Newton's third law? "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction." That's the gist of it.

Newton's shoe (which can take two weeks to get used to) allows you to strike first with your forefoot, not your heel, and uses that energy to propel you forward. The shoe appears to give athletes a competitive advantage and Abshire, who has been making racing orthotics for athletes for 20 years and coaching runners for 18, says, "Newtons have up to 58 per cent more energy return than other shoes."

At first, several large footwear companies (including one on the West Coast) were given the opportunity to buy the technology. Not one of them bit. "They concluded that the shoe was too difficult to mass produce," says Abshire. "After our third rejection we said, 'we know this'll work, let's produce it ourselves'."

Lee believes that they have little

B

PERFECT COMPANY Newton Running

competition because Newton's shoe targets forefoot runners, whereas all the giant footwear brands focus on heel strikers. Forefoot striking is the running style of most professional runners and the one that both Abshire and Lee believe is the proper way to run. "We're guessing," says Lee, "that 20 per cent of the tens of millions of runners are forefoot runners. So our potential market is millions."

Abshire says, "We spent so much time and research on the technology, but we're up against bigger companies with bigger budgets. If you check out the latest issues of running magazines, you'll see they are trying to copy us and talk about the 'third law principle'. But we are the first shoe company to build shoes for proper running. We think that most people have not been taught to run properly and the big companies have missed this market."

Lee, who spent the first six months of this year launching the company while having radiation for prostate cancer, says, "It's been quite a year. We had instant credibility because eight-time world Ironman triathlon champion Paula Newby-Fraser was winning races in our shoes. We targeted triathletes – a group of three million technology-driven athletes who know each other through events and blogging. And the internet allowed us to launch the company in a way we could afford. It's been a perfect storm of events for us that allowed us to launch our company."

Both Lee and Abshire plan to donate the majority of profits to charities including the Prostate Cancer Foundation and Challenged Athlete Foundation. "With \$13m [€9.5m] of investment," says Lee, "we had to rely on friends but Danny and I didn't do this to make money."

Abshire and Lee like the idea of being a little company with a good product. "If we're a success," says Lee, "we want to be able to share our success with people less fortunate." Abshire's goal is to continue to focus on the technology. Next off the blocks is a trail running shoe to be launched in the spring, an even more specialised racing shoe and a walking shoe – produced at the request of many athletes who don't want to wear anything but Newtons. — (M)



03