

Physical Culture

GEAR TEST WITH Hillary Biscay, Professional Triathlete



PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS RICHARDS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Compression Socks Make an Impression

AT the Ford Ironman World Championship held in Kona, Hawaii, earlier this month, many of the triathletes looked a bit like cheerleaders or tourists with knee-high socks on. Instead, they were some of the growing number of triathletes and runners wearing compression socks, tight over-the-calf socks that are migrating from the medical therapy world to athletics.

At Kona, 415 of the 1,677 competitors in the run portion of the race wore the socks, said Chris Bohannon of the triathlon gear manufacturer Zoot. They wore them to increase blood flow, supposedly supplying lower leg muscles with more oxygen and more evenly distributing muscle strain. Compression socks were originally used by diabetics, pregnant women and travelers seeking better circulation and preventing blood clots.

Studies of runners in New Zealand found mixed results — compression socks didn't help middle-distance runners but "there does appear to be some benefit of wearing these garments on maintenance of leg power," Ajmol Ali, a sport and exercise science professor at Massey University in Auckland and lead researcher on the studies, wrote in an e-mail message. To see if the socks make athletes' legs feel more powerful and less fatigued, Hillary Biscay, a professional triathlete who won the Ford Ironman Wisconsin last month and placed 35th among pro women in Hawaii, wore compression socks on a variety of her two or three daily runs. Like many of the athletes studied, Ms. Biscay preferred the least-tight socks for training. SARAH BOWEN SHEA



CEP WOMEN'S O2MAX COMPRESSION SOCKS \$59.95, www.trisports.com. Ms. Biscay was a big fan of these "supercomfortable" socks, which have "thicker, soft and stretchy material in the toe and heel." The O2max provided "just the right amount of compression." Ms. Biscay said they "seemed to help reduce the fatigue" in her legs during training sessions. The socks "wicked exceptionally well" on an extra-sweaty treadmill run.



SUGOI R+R KNEE HIGH \$30, www.sugoi.com. The tester "initially felt a bit skeptical of these socks because they are the least tight of the bunch." But Ms. Biscay was soon "convinced of their effectiveness." She wore the Sugoi socks on an eight-mile tempo run with hill intervals, her third workout of the day. Her legs "felt very fresh throughout the run instead of feeling heavy and tight," as they normally do after so much effort.