Tibesti.com Best of the Best: Racewalking Training Shoes for Men

Racewalkers are a different breed from runners so we need different shoes to perform at our best. The high-heeled, stiff, klunky trainers that most runners wear will not do for the high-speed gait of the racewalker. But running racing flats? Now that’s where the action is!

Ever since New Balance phased out the 111 racewalking shoe in early 2007, running racing flats are about all we have left. But that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Racing flats come in a wide variety of styles ranging from flimsy non-supportive slipper-like creations to much more cushiony trainer-racers. Within that range racewalkers can find a wide array of PR-worthy shoes.

Most racing flats are *slip lasted, or strobel lasted*, techniques which allow for light weight and superior flexibility. Because we racewalkers hit the ground with less than half the force of the typical runner’s stride, we can get away with these much lighter shoes for both training and racing.

Steer away from the flimsiest shoes, like cross-country racers or track flats, but any shoe designed for 15k to marathon racing should work well for racewalk training and racing.

The downside to using racing flats for day-to-day wear is that they’re designed for runners to wear only once every few weeks to race, so they often don’t last very long. But life-spans vary considerably. Some flats will last 300 miles or more; some extremely lightweight flats may be shot after a mere 50 miles. Shoes designed for marathons are made with high carbon outsoles that will usually hold up for several hundred miles.

The features sought out by racewalkers are light weight, a low heel, a flexible midsole, a moderate amount of support, and a generous toe-box to prevent blisters or the dreaded “black toe-nails” that can arise after miles of walking in narrow-toed shoes. Outlandish colors seem to be a plus.

There are dozens of shoes that “foot” the bill. But who does it best?

For serious racers looking for the lightest and fastest shoes around, the Nike Air Zoom Streak XC 2 is heads above the rest. For marathon walkers or 50k specialists looking for more support, the adidas adiZero Rocket, the Brooks Racer ST 4, the Asics Gel-DS Racer 8 and the Mizuno Musha 2 get the edge for lightweight stability.

Buying a shoe for racewalking isn’t like buying a car. There aren’t an unlimited number of dazzling features that will steer you one way or another. Ultimately, fit is what matters most. How far you’ll be walking, how heavy you are, and the mechanics of your feet will also play a role. What the Olympic Champion wears—or the guy who just won your local 5k for that matter—is immaterial. Having said that, these are some of the very best new models from which to choose.
Nike Air Zoom Streak XC 2 (Men’s)

The Nike Air Zoom Streak XC 2 has the name of a cross-country shoe, but the design elements of a super fast racewalk racing shoe. Absurdly light at only 5.4 ounces this value-priced speedster has Nike’s proprietary Advanced Cushlon ST midsole and a Zoom Air unit in the heel to provide cushioning and impact protection. The full mesh upper is the key to the Nike Air Zoom Streak XC 2’s incredibly light weight, but also provides breathability. This is a perfect shoe for summer racing or interval training.

- Release date: July 2009
- Heel: Medium to narrow width
- Weight: 5.4 ounces
- Upper: Perforated textile and synthetic leather upper materials for superior breathability
- Outsole: adiWEAR® outsole for best durability, in high-wear areas.

Adidas adiZero Rocket

As the name implies, the adiZero Rocket is super fast. This super-low profile racing flat is very similar in design to the legendary adidas racewalking shoes of the 1970’s and ‘80s. With full forefoot adiprene, the Rocket will deliver protection up to the 50k for lightweight racewalkers with good technique and foot structure. Others will love the Rocket for 5k to 20k racing.
Brooks Racer ST 4

With plenty of cushioning and support for moderate over-pronation, the Racer ST 4 is an excellent long distance race shoe. The Racer ST 4 is also well-suited for not-so-petite racewalkers who want support and stability in a fast-feeling shoe.

Asics Gel-DS Racer 8

One of the most popular racing shoes in the Asics history, the GEL-DS Racer is back after a three-year hiatus. This ultra-lightweight racer delivers just enough stability for
support, yet remains a true racing shoe. Don’t let the name fool you. The Gel-DS Racer is also a great every day training shoe for racwalkers, and is appropriate for speed work, short races as well as long training walks and races, including marathons and 50k’s.

- Release date: January 2010
- Weight: 7.6 ounces
- Designed for minimum to moderate over-pronation
- Last: Semi-curved, slip lasted
- Heel: Medium to narrow
- Heel height: 19mm, forefoot 10mm
- Breathable mesh with supportive synthetic overlays
- Outsole: Heel: AHAR carbon rubber
- Forefoot: DuraSponge improves cushioning while maintaining durability.

**Mizuno Wave Ronin 2**

The Ronin 2 offers great stability and heel protection for a racing flat. If you can get over the mustard yellow color, the Ronin 2 has a long-wearing outsole that will provide miles of smooth-feeling training and racing comfort.
• Release date: January 2010
• Weight: 7.6 ounces
• Last: Semi-curved, slip-lasted
• Designed for neutral pronation to supination
• Midsole: SmoothRide engineered Parallel Wave technology allows for natural foot motion while dispersing shock.
• Heel height 18mm, forefoot 9mm
• Upper: AIRmesh provides outstanding breathability. Microfiber overlays provide support.
• Outsole: X10 carbon rubber provides durability at heel strike, G3 DR reduces weight and increases flexibility.

Best of the Rest:

New Balance RC769

The RC769 is best suited for those who have slight to moderate overpronation and is the ideal flat for fast half and full marathons and 50k’s. It’s also a great choice for walkers looking for a little more shoe than a minimalist racing flat can provide.

• Release date: March 2009
• Weight: 7.9 ounces
• Designed for mild to moderate over-pronation
• Last: Semi-curved Strobel last
• Heel: Narrow
• Midsole: Dual-density ACTEVA with ABZORB in the heel and forefoot
• Outsole: Ndurance rubber for heel durability and a blown rubber, sticky rubber forefoot for responsiveness and traction.
Puma Complete RoadRacer III

The RoadRacer III is a responsive racing shoe, which performs great for 5Ks and 10Ks, but it offers enough heft and stability for fast marathons and 50k’s.

- Release date: March 2010
- Weight: 7.1 ounces
- Heel: Medium

Pearl Izumi Streak

Better known in triathlon circles, the Pearl Izumi is earning converts in the racewalking arena. The Streak is designed for use in distances ranging from 5k to the marathon. Forefoot grooves and a low-profile design make the Streak feel fast, but they are also designed with comfort in mind. Excellent cushioning and durability in a lightweight racer makes the Streak a winner all around.

- Weight: 8.8 ounces
• Skydex® forefoot and heel crash pad deliver miles of protection and cushioned comfort.
• Forefoot flex grooves for a smooth, efficient ride
• High-performance dual-density EVA midsole provides maximum shock absorption.

**ASICS Gel Tarther**

Making an appearance in the U.S. market for the first time, the Tarther is a Japanese mainstay. Built for racing over any distance, this workhorse shoe is appropriate for any distance for both training and racing.

- Release date: January 2010
- Weight: 7.2 ounces
- Heel: Medium to narrow
- Heel height: 19mm, forefoot 10mm

**Vibram FiveFingers Sprint**

The Vibram FiveFingers Sprint multisport shoes are not for everyone, but they are an interesting choice for walkers looking for a lightweight, flexible shoe that allows the foot to move naturally through the stride cycle. They provide the benefits and comfort of barefoot racewalking with the protection of Vibram™ soles. The Vibram FiveFingers Sprint is probably different from anything you’ve ever worn for racewalking before, so break them in gradually, wearing them only a few minutes at time at first to allow your feet to adapt to using different muscles, then gradually increase your usage of the shoes over the next few weeks.
• Release date: May 2010
• Weight: 5.4 ounces
• Individual toe slots enhance dexterity, control and stability to deliver a natural walking motion.
• Thin, abrasion-resistant polyamide stretch fabric fits low on the foot and offers quick-drying comfort.
• Upper: Abrasion-resistant stretch polyamide fabric
• Sole: Vibram TC-1 performance rubber
• Footbed: Antimicrobial microfiber
• Machine washable