

# Scrooge's Guide to Shoe Buying

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Back in 1977 when I started running, a good pair of running shoes cost about \$30--not that the shoes I wore back then could be considered "good." At the time Mom thought that \$30 for shoes was outrageous, so for my first-ever pair of running shoes we settled on a hideous pair of fluorescent orange New Balance training flats for about 20 bucks at Marshalls. But I digress...

Anyway, my first good pair of shoes were Tiger (now Asics) Excalibers that came in at about \$30 on sale at Mel's Army/Navy in Nanuet, NY. Well, ever since then I've based my shoe purchasing decisions on that price level and, believe it or not, I had never spent more than about \$30 for shoes until very recently. (I guess we all tend to get caught in a time warp when it comes to certain important (to us) things of our lives: we all still hang on to the music we listened to in high school, and those old couples you see at Wal-Mart wear the same polyester duds and bad hair styles that worked for them in the '70s.)

It's actually been surprisingly easy to remain a low-budget shoe buyer over the years. Periodic sponsorship has helped, but in the gaps I've always been able to buy a good pair of close-out flats (or two, or six) for \$29.95 when the catalog outfits and local running stores have their end-of-season fire sales. Until last week that is. I finally bit the bullet and spent (gasp!) \$39 for a pair of shoes.

Some background: Two years ago I bought 4 pair of Nike Air Streak Lights that Sports Unlimited unloaded for 29 bucks each when Jumbo Sports took over. I loved the shoes, so when the Eastbay catalog started advertising them for \$39 a few months ago I seriously considered buying a pair or two but balked--they were \$10 over my limit. Well, the catalogs kept coming, teasing me, begging me to buy the shoes. I don't know why, but last week I finally took that perilous leap. 39 Samoleans. Ouch!

I'm happy with the Nikes, but uneasy with the >\$30 precedent. Buying them for that outrageous amount got me to thinking: There are so many ways to get cheap shoes, why on earth did I spend so much?

Over the past year I've acquired perhaps a dozen pair of cheap shoes from a variety of sources. I certainly recommend that new runners buy from a knowledgeable retailer--Joe Sims at Wards comes to mind. Their advice comes a lot cheaper than an MD's, and you'll be certain that your shoes fit properly before purchasing them. But if price is your primary concern consider the following:

**1. Catalog sales.** Many running stores sell shoes via mail-order. Among these are **Eastbay: (800) 826-2205 <http://www.eastbay.com>** (where I purchased the \$39 air streak lights in addition to several pair of \$19.99 Reebok cross-country flats), **Hoy's Sports: (800) 873-4329 <http://www.hoys.com>** (a great source for racewalking shoes), and **Road Runner Sports: (800) 551-5558 <http://www.roadrunnersports.com>** (who recently sold New Balance 110s for \$29.95).

**2. Store close-outs.** It pays to be out of fashion. Many stores sell their end of season stock at drastically reduced prices. Recent additions to my collection include two pair of Nike Air Skylons for \$19.95 at the Nike Factory Outlet in Castle Rock, CO, and \$29.99 at Gilles Sports in Evansville, IN. But you don't have to travel to get similar deals. Yes, even Joe Sims overstocks sometimes and will let shoes go at, or near cost at the end of the season.

**3. Wear testing.** I've gotten several pair of shoes from New Balance over the past year, including some great prototype racewalking shoes. New Balance was looking for elite athletes to test the new model, but if you're lucky enough to wear men's size 9, or women's size 7 the major shoe companies want your feet. If you foot the bill, give a call.

*New Balance (800) 622-1218*

*Nike (800) 344-6453*

*Reebok (888) 898-9028*

**4. Stick around for the drawing.** I know I've written about this before, but you're nuts if you leave a race before the door prize drawing. I've gotten a few pair of shoes for winning races, but it's even easier to take home the leather for just sticking around. (And even if you don't win the shoes, I'll trade you two (2!) pair of \$39 Nikes if you win the free airline tickets!) And speaking of airlines...

**5. Always go for the triple connections.** When booking flights, always go for the ugliest and tightest connections possible. When the airline loses your luggage you can usually beg your way into a free pair of shoes. My thanks to Delta for my most recent pair of Mizuno Phantoms and the awesome pair New Balance 150 racers that I wore in the Delchamps 10K. Finally, as a last resort...

**6. Advertise your shoe size.** I while back I happened to mention my shoe size (11) on the racewalk Internet list, and within a week I was the proud owner of six pair of slightly used racing flats. A fellow walker was unhappy with the shoes for one reason or another, and instead of giving them to Goodwill or sending them to runners in Kenya, he sent them to me. Couldn't hurt to let your friends know your size in case they have any donations.

I could go on, but Mo says I went over my word count last month and if I go over 1 page again she's going to cut me o...

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