

Barefoot/minimalist shoes

MINIMALIST SHOES AIMED AT MAXIMUM PERFORMANCE - SOME CONVENTIONAL AND SOME NOT!

THESE shoes are essentially stripped down versions of the more protective models and offer lightness and a great feel of the surface beneath you. They are not for everyone, though, and are intended to make you run the way you would barefoot – on your forefoot, with a lower feel to the ground. Many of the models now offer adequate amounts of cushioning and can be used off-road too.

adidas adipure Gazelle

SIMILAR in construction to the adipure Motion, this model is a trimmed-down and lighter version. The foot feels noticeably lower

to the ground, yet is nevertheless adequately protected and the midsole has a responsive feel and a noticeable "springy" toe-off about it. Fit is once again snug

from the stretchy fabric upper. It is certainly a "barefoot" shoe that borrows from its traditional styled running shoe relations and it's all the better for it, being comfortable and wearable straight from the box.

Cost: £80

Left: adidas adipure Gazelle



Below: Freet 4+1



Freet 4+1

THIS brand combines the features of a couple of shoes to create a new model at a good-value price. The separate big toe takes design tips from the Nike Rift shoe from more than 10 years ago (perhaps as well as sandals of ancient times), while the thin rubber outsole borrows a little from present day "five-fingered" shoes. It's a combined concept that works well and for those used to this fit and feel the price makes them a very attractive proposition as it's a minimalist shoe with the most minimal price on test! The shoe fits well and offers protection from the elements, which ultimately is all it's designed to do in a shoe of this type.

Cost: £50

Asics Gel Lyte33 2

AS late entrants to the more natural running school of thought, Asics first introduced models with a 10mm heel drop, but now in this model it is 6mm. The stand-out technical feature in this shoe is the "FluidAxis" – two deep flexible grooves in the midsole beneath the rear of the foot. Our testers liked the feel of the cushioning of the shoe and its responsive, natural feel, although they didn't notice any benefit from the FluidAxis technology and questioned its need in a shoe that encourages a mid to forefoot foot strike. Overall, it's a very comfortable shoe, with the classic feel of many of the brand's lightweight racers and the addition of a little more forefoot cushioning. The high abrasion rubber in critical areas gives the outsole excellent durability.

Cost: £100



Right: Asics Gel Lyte33 2

adidas adipure Motion

THOUGH billed as a shoe to mimic the natural movement of the foot, this model could equally be used as a road racer. There are two layers of midsole cushioning that create a very responsive feel and provide a little forward propulsion. It's not a zero-drop shoe, the heel being around 4mm higher than the forefoot, but for many that will make it all the more instantly usable, particularly for faster runs. It's a great-fitting shoe with a stretch upper that hugs the foot, yet still allows a good range of movement. A synthetic suede lining gives an enhanced fit and extra comfort.

Cost: £80

Below: adidas adipure Motion

