

REVIEWS

Cross Country Shoes Fall 2010 by Cregg Weinmann

Cross Country 2010 toes the starting line with something fresh—fresh air, fresh school year, and a fresh batch of spikes and flats designed to dig into the terrain of the toughest courses around. Here we take our annual look at eight newly released or updated cross country shoes for fall. All are low-profile models that skimp a bit on protection in favor of performance.

Deciding whether you should go for traditional XC spikes or a spikeless model should be based on the racing surfaces you'll encounter during your season. Cross country spikes are slightly better than spikeless shoes at gripping muddy or soggy ground, but they are limited to use on all-natural courses and are not allowed for high school use in California. Spikeless models work almost as well as spikes in the mud and in addition, they manage pavement, sidewalks, and rocky surfaces and work well on indoor or outdoor tracks. Finally, always try to get in a few speed sessions in your racing shoes before the actual race, since the low profile of the shoe coupled with the intense effort of racing can be tough on your soft tissue if you haven't prepared well. Okay, that's out of the way, so it's on to the shoes ...



adidas XCS

The XCS is the update to the RLH from a couple seasons back. The XCS features the same Traxion outsole of the RLH in both a six-spike configuration and the more versatile spikeless version.

The upper is the same in each: a mini airmesh and a supportive, extended heel counter with a low-volume, foot-hugging fit. The midsole is low even for low-profile shoes and is molded EVA. The EVA provides adequate cushioning on its own, and gets an assist from the Traxion lugs that supply not only traction, but some cushion (via deflection). The close fit, deft touch of cushioning, and excellent traction help the foot efficiently negotiate whatever the cross country course puts between you and the finish line.

SPIKE/SPIKELESS \$60

Sizes: men 7-13, 14, 15; women 5-12 Weight: (men's 11) 8.3 oz. spike; 7.8 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 7.5 oz. spike; 7.0 oz. spikeless Fit: snug throughout



ASICS Hyper XC & Hyper Rocketgirl

This update retains the same midsole/outsole in last season's version: low-profile, molded EVA and a high-

traction, lugged sole that, judging by the significant number of runners who wear them, are extremely effective. Changes have been implemented in the upper, particularly some upgrades to the meshes which make them sturdier. The smooth and well-finished interior is supportive and breathable. The extended heel counter and added medial overlays deter picking up mud while offering better support this time around. Overall, the ASICS fit, gender specificity, traction, and quality deliver good value.

SPIKE \$60/SPIKELESS \$55

Sizes: men 4-13, 14, 15; women 5-11, 12 Weight: (men's 11) 9.2 oz. spike, 8.6 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 7.9 oz. spike; 7.3 oz. spikeless Fit: snug heel, close forefoot



Brooks Mach 12

The Mach 12 marks the first significant change in these shoes since version 5 way back in 2001. New are the last (the foot model that the shoe is built around) and the pattern of the upper. These changes align

the Mach 12 with the Wire, Brooks' new distance spike, and give the shoe a bit lower profile. Noticeably more pronounced is the toe spring that propels the foot forward. The fit has been improved by adding webbing in the midfoot lacing to better cinch the shoe around the foot. The interior has a suede ankle collar and arch wrap that secure the foot comfortably—even if you run in them without socks. The cushioning is familiar: just enough for the varied terrain, but not so much as to add extra weight. In fact, the new midsole and upper shave almost 10% from a men's size 11. It all adds up—fit, cushion, weight—to earn our Best Renovation award.

SPIKE/SPIKELESS \$65

Sizes: men 5-12; women 5-12 Weight: (men's 11) 7.6 oz. spike, 6.8 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 6.7 oz. spike, 6.0 oz. spikeless Fit: snug heel, close forefoot



Mizuno Wave Kaze 6

Five versions of the Kaze have integrated the Wave technology with a breathable, supportive upper.

And now we can make that six. The Kaze 6 maintains the molded EVA midsole with the modified Wave plate designed for cross country. The lugged outsole is also carried over in both a 6-spike configuration and a spikeless version. The new upper features fewer overlays (eliminated to save weight and improve breathability) with a more sheath-like fit (some runners may want to go up a half-size for a more comfortable fit). Runners familiar with the Kaze will find the performance they expect, while those searching for traction, good cushioning, and a secure fit have one more possibility in a racing shoe.

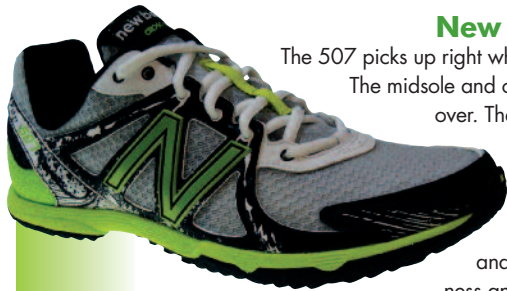
SPIKE/SPIKELESS \$80

Sizes: men 7-13; women 6-11 Weight: (men's 11) 8.9 oz. spike, 7.7 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 7.8 oz. spike, 7.0 oz. spikeless Fit: snug heel, very snug forefoot



REVIEWS

Cross Country Shoes Fall 2010 *continued*



New Balance 507

The 507 picks up right where the 506 left off. The midsole and outsole are carried over. The same solid rubber, lugged outsole provides durable traction with a TPU plate for protection and springy responsiveness and molded EVA for a measure of cushion on harder surfaces. The familiar story of changes to the upper here results in a more supportive midfoot saddle. (It was previously just a couple straps from the eyestay to the heel counter.) Now the heel is locked down more securely and the forefoot is better supported with a full rand that also helps keep the elements out. The barefoot interior feel has even been improved a little, as the closed mesh breathes well and synthetic suede on the tongue and low-cut ankle collar has a soft, non-irritating feel. And the availability of men's widths broadens its reach (no pun intended). The effect is a well-executed cross country performer.

SPIKE \$60/SPIKELESS \$50

Sizes: men 4-13, 14, 15 (D, 2E widths); women 5.5-10, 11 Weight: (men's 11) 7.5 oz. spike, 6.8 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 6.7 oz. spike, 6.0 oz. spikeless Fit: snug heel, close forefoot



Nike Zoom Waffle XC/Racer VII & Zoom Jana Star XC/Waffle

The Waffle Racer pioneered the track spike/racer/cross country hybrid. Version VII upgrades a few features while maintaining its most effective components. The midsole/outsole is unchanged with a four-ribbed waffle tread and a co-molded shank that works equally on tracks, hills, and dales. The upper's no-sew technology enhances the support with a smooth interior and, though it gains a few grams in the process, it's a worthwhile trade-off as the full rand and overlays reinforce the mesh throughout. The fit is unchanged—it's close—but with good curvature and snugness to match the racing foot. The matching lasts of the spiked (Zoom Waffle XC) and spikeless models, the gender specificity of the Jana and Waffle Racer, and broadest cross country size range in the industry offer runners and teams a wide variety of XC options.

SPIKE \$55/SPIKELESS \$45

Sizes: men 1-13, 14, 15; women 5-12 Weight: (men's 11) 7.4 oz. spike, 6.8 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 6.5 oz. spike, 5.9 oz. spikeless Fit: snug heel, close forefoot



Puma Complete Haraka XCS

Haraka is a Swahili word best translated as "hurry," which aptly describes the new Complete Haraka XCS that's built on the strength of Puma's recent track and cross country successes. The outsole is an aggressively lugged, six-spiked configuration designed to maximize traction. The midsole is a healthy slab of molded EVA that seems at home on the hard surfaces without being too spongy off-road. The upper is a closed mesh with good breathability and a combination of welded overlays and soft synthetic suede. The interior is cozy enough for bare feet, with a velour-lined tongue and innersole offering a plush feel. The performance says hurry, but the attention to detail didn't cut any corners.

SPIKE/SPIKELESS \$65

Sizes: men 7-12, 13, 14; women 5.5-12 Weight: (men's 11) 7.6 oz. spike, 6.7 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 6.6 oz. spike, 6.0 oz. spikeless Fit: snug heel, close forefoot



Saucony Shay XC 2

Round two of the Shay XC features improved tailoring and a neat way to customize the shoe. The fit has been tailored to wrap the foot more snugly, especially through the arch. The upper has a sturdy rip-stop fabric on the sides of the vamp with an open stretch mesh on the tongue down to the toes while wrapping the forefoot inside the shoe. Overlays anchor the eyestay under the midfoot/heel. In a nice touch, various colors of vinyl film can be inserted into the overlays to customize the shoe with your team colors. The proven midsole and outsole carry over from round one, providing good cushioning and outstanding traction. The combination of fit, cushioning, and traction earned the Shay XC 2 our award for Best Cross Country shoe.



SPIKE \$75/SPIKELESS \$70

Sizes: men 7-13, 14; women 5-11, 12 Weight: (men's 11) 8.0 oz. spike, 7.1 oz. spikeless; (women's 8) 7.0 oz. spike, 6.2 oz. spikeless Fit: snug throughout

CREGG WEINMANN is footwear and running products reviewer for Running Network LLC. He can be reached via e-mail at shuz2run@lightspeed.net.

Copyright © 2010 by Running Network LLC. All Rights Reserved. No part of this article may be stored, copied, or reprinted without prior written permission of Running Network LLC. Reprinted here with permission.