

MBA FEATURE

LIGHT

Flat-Pedal Shoes Face Off

Top kicks go toe-to-toe

Every rider has to decide whether to go clipless or run flat pedals. A majority of riders run clipless, and there are certainly good reasons for that, but we would like to point out that in some cases it might be doing more harm than good. The benefits of clipless pedals include efficient power transfer for blasting up hills and feeling secure and one with the bike, but clipless pedals can cause riders to develop poor cornering techniques.

Flat pedals, on the other hand, force riders to use proper technique and to develop positive riding habits that will ultimately improve their skills. While pedal choice is important, wearing the proper shoes for running flats is equally important. Shoes come in a broad range of fits and offer different features. While we realize shoe comfort is subjective, we thought we would test a few brands to help with your decision. We took eight shoes and stomped right into testing! For every shoe in our lineup, we had our main test rider (size 10.5 U.S., 45 EU) use the same pedal on the same bike to focus specifically on shoe performance and feel with an already familiar machine. All the shoes in this test fall in the price range of \$100 to \$175.

PEARL IZUMI X-Alp Launch Mid WRX

Tech features: Kicking off our test is the highest-priced shoe here, from Pearl Izumi, the X-Alp Launch Mid WRX. This design offers extra ankle support, yet it sits on the same platform as the lower-profile Launch Flat option. The Mid WRXs rely on a BOA fit system for easy adjustment. The "WRX" label represents the water-repellent membrane used in the top construction, along with Cordura fabric for durability and additional water resistance. The outsole is made with Goodyear's premium rubber.

At the pedals: Although it is a high-top shoe, surprisingly it was the lightest shoe in our shootout. Most shoes were tested in an EU size of 45, but these particular shoes fit our test riders perfectly in a 45.5. The Mid WRX tends to run a little small. The design not only gave us extra protection against hitting the crankarms, it also provided a great deal of ankle support. The BOA system, along with the top Velcro strap, helped the shoe to conform to our feet for the perfect fit. The gusseted tongue



Photo courtesy: Pat Carrigan



was key in keeping out dirt and debris, while the Goodyear sole remained durable yet tacky on our pedals. Our main test rider reported that the platform was moderately stiff and great for transferring power to the pedals. With that said, this was not the most noteworthy pedal in our lineup for maximum pedaling efficiency. Yes, the price is steep, but this might be the perfect option if you are looking for more ankle protection.

SPECS

- Price:** \$175
- Weight:** 872g (1.9 pounds)
- Outsole:** Goodyear with PinLoc tread
- Fit:** BOA L6C dial
- Contact:** www.pearlizumi.com

PEARL IZUMI X-Alp Flow Pop

Tech features: Just like the last Pearl Izumi shoes in this shootout, the X-Alp Flow Pops utilize a BOA dial to secure the shoes. The Flow Pops have what Pearl Izumi describes as a "grippy performance rubber" compound combined with Pearl Izumi's chevron-shaped PinLoc tread pattern. This pattern is also seen on the Mid WRXs; however, the Flow Pops do not use the Goodyear compound. This shoe is also constructed from a one-piece midsole and outsole to help absorb harder landings.

At the pedals: These were the most flexible shoes out of all the options tested. How flexible, you might ask? Well, they can literally be bent in half from the middle of the shoe. For some of our test riders, this was ideal, as it allowed their feet to conform to the pedals while providing a locked-in feel; however, the lack of extra support was noticeable on long days of riding. The Flow Pop's fit was very comfortable, while the minimal amount of material for protection provided excellent airflow to the feet. Overall, the Flow Pop is a great fit out the box, but most of our test riders wanted something with a bit more support and protection for the rough stuff.



SPECS

- Price:** \$125
- Weight:** 884g (1.9 pounds)
- Outsole:** PinLoc rubber/tread pattern
- Fit:** BOA L6 dial
- Contact:** www.pearlizumi.com

Northwave Tribe

Tech features: Next up are two shoes from an Italian manufacturer known as Northwave. The brand Northwave is no stranger to the outdoor shoe world, with a history that dates back to 1993. Now, Northwave has gone all in on the cycling market. The Tribe and Clan we tested both have rubber soles by **Michelin**. The Tribe shoe has a simple design intended for riders more concerned with style. The shoes have a suede upper with breathable mesh inserts. The non-stretch laces stow in an elastic band. The Clan shoe is the next step up from the Tribe in terms of pure performance.

At the pedals: The Tribes were noticeably less flexible than the Flow Pops and provided more toe-cap protection and extra cushion towards the heel of the shoes. A major highlight was the grip provided by the **Michelin** rubber. Not only was the compound supportive, the tread design hooked onto the pedal's pins well. Off the bike, the Pearl Izumi tread was a bit slippery on hard-packed trails. Unlike

the Pearls, the Northwave Tribes had excellent traction for hiking to the next drop-in point. The Tribe shoe is a worthy option given its price, comfort, protection and stability on the pedals.

SPECS

- Price:** \$100
- Weight:** 926g (2 pounds)
- Outsole:** **Michelin-NW** compound
- Fit:** Laces with elastic holder
- Contact:** www.northwave.com



MBA FEATURE

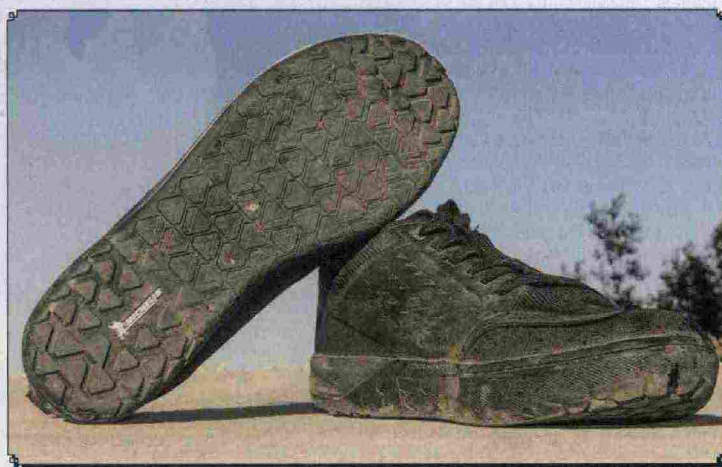
Northwave Clan

Tech features: As mentioned, the Northwave Clans offer more performance features than the Tribes. To start off, there is an EVA midsole for extra cushioning, along with a TPU shank that prevents rotation and adds stiffness. Northwave also reinforced the heel and toe with additional protection. Like the Tribes, the Clan shoes use a pair of laces and an elastic band to tuck them away. Considering that the Clan costs \$40 more than the Tribe, how does the Clan stack up?

At the pedals: Even though the Clans are among the heaviest shoes we tested (size 45), they still felt light enough for trail riding yet protective enough for rugged gravity laps. The bite of the **Michelin** compound provided excellent grip on the pedals; however, off the bike the compound was stiff in comparison to the Tribe's compound. It was tough to grab traction for the hike-a-bike sections with the flat contact area on the Clans. Although they missed the mark as far as traction off the bike, the Clans were the stiffest shoes tested and offered remarkable power transfer that could rival some cross-country clipless shoes. The Clans offer a great platform for connecting with the pedals and offer more protection than the Tribes.

SPECS

Price: \$140
Weight: 976g (2.15 pounds)
Outsole: **Michelin-NW**, EVA midsole
Fit: Laces with elastic holder
Contact: www.northwave.com



Giant Shuttle Flat

Tech features: Some riders like to stick with the big names on the bike-manufacturing side that also produce accessories and apparel. If you are loyal to your bike brand, you might find yourself slipping on a pair of Giant's Shuttle Flats. Designed to be versatile, these shoes feature a durable dual-density rubber cup sole with Giant's GRIPR rubber compound placed right at the pedal contact

point. They also feature an internal EVA midsole, a TPU toe guard, and reflective laces that tuck into a mesh pocket at the tongue.

At the pedals: As intended by Giant, the Shuttle Flat is great to wear to the office, go hit the dirt jumps after work and then get ready to meet your buddies for a cold one. These shoes provide all-day comfort and are suitable for most riding situations. We did have issues with the top cap coming apart during testing, but this was easily resolved by Giant's customer-service team sending out a fresh pair. The inner layers of the shoes have a thinner cushion in comparison to the Ride Concept Livewires and Northwave Clans, but the price and all-day comfort of the Shuttle Flat rank this product among the best in this shootout.

SPECS

Price: \$110
Weight: 928g (2 pounds)
Outsole: GRIPR rubber
Fit: Laces with tongue pocket
Contact: www.giant-bicycles.com



Ride Concepts Livewire

Tech features: Similar to Giant's Shuttle Flat, the Ride Concept Livewire is designed to be an all-day-comfort, wear-everywhere mountain bike shoe. The Livewire features a Rubber Kinetics DST 6.0 High Grip outsole, a synthetic upper with breathable mesh, and custom-molded toe and heel protection. The midsole on the Livewire is constructed with EVA for pedaling efficiency, while the

insole features D30 impact-absorbing technology. The reason for using these compounds is to ensure the rider is covered wherever he stomps.

At the pedals: The first thing you will notice when you slip into the Livewires is the custom heel pocket. This extra support and padding at the heel do require a break-in period. Our main test rider noticed that after five to six rides, his feet became fully settled into the extra protection. The shoe has a fully gusseted tongue that prevents dirt and trail debris from getting into the shoe. With the EVA midsole and use of D30 technology, impact absorption was the biggest advantage in comparison to other shoes in the \$100 price range.

All in all, the shoe that started it all for Ride Concepts met the demands we made on the trails.

SPECS

Price: \$100

Weight: 894g (1.97 pounds)

Outsole: DST 6.0 High Grip rubber

Fit: Laces with elastic tuck

Contact: www.rideconcepts.com



Sidi Dimaro

Tech features: Sidi is the other Italian brand in our shootout that entered the world of enduro and gravity with its Dimaro shoes. As with all of its products, Sidi focused on specific features to achieve performance. Unlike the others shoes in this shootout, the Dimaros can also be converted to run a clipless pedal. The Dimaros feature a Vibram outsole, laces with a Velcro strap, and an elastic band at the heel to prevent debris from entering. How does this feature-packed, second-most-expensive pair of shoes in our test hold up against its competition?

At the pedals: The fit was immediately comfortable out of the box. The size-45 Dimaros we tested weighed the most of any pair of shoes in this shootout; however, the weight did not keep us from transferring efficient power to the pedals. Off the bike, the rubber piece used to fill the cleat box tended to collect debris underneath the plate. This resulted in the rubber plate actually flapping out a bit, but it never caused issues with contact to our pedals. Luckily, this plate is easily replaced if worn or misplaced when swapping. The Dimaros provided all-around protection with the combination of laces covered by Velcro straps, the elastic heel band and the protected toe cap. Overall, we were impressed with the Vibram soles' support, durability, and traction on and off the bike.

SPECS

Price: \$150

Weight: 1006g (2.2 pounds)

Outsole: Vibram

Fit: Laces with velcro straps

Contact: www.sidi.com



MBA FEATURE**Shimano SH-GR501**

Tech features: Over the years we have tested the Shimano GR5, GR7 and GR9. Now, Shimano has launched its latest update of the GR5 with the SH-GR501. This classic flat-pedal shoe features Shimano's proprietary rubber outsole, a synthetic upper with mesh and reinforced toe/ankle protection. Unlike some of the other styles tested, the GR501's style is a more classic skate-shoe look that might be a more attractive option for some riders.

At the pedals: As expected from Shimano, the comfort and fit made our main test rider feel right at home. The laces really made it simple to fine-tune the fit. Above all others in our testing, these shoes proved to have a great balance of price, durability and style. With that said, we give credit for the extra protection at the ankle, but we would have liked to see a reinforced toe cap like some of the other competitors offer at this price.

SPECS

Price: \$110

Weight: 872g (1.8 pounds)

Outsole: Proprietary Shimano

Fit: Laces with elastic tuck

Contact: www.bike.shimano.com

**THE RESULTS**

While we covered a lot of tech talk, let's talk pricing. Truth be told, this is most likely the biggest factor for any rider. The Pearl Izumi Mid WRX shoes sell for \$175, while the Northwave Tribe and Ride Concepts Livewire retail for \$100. For some, the extra protection, BOA enclosure system and reputable platform on the Mid WRXs might win them over regardless of the price. It is true that there are lots of notable features packed into the more expensive options; however, in terms of balancing price with performance, who stands out?

As we mentioned, shoe preference is certainly subjective; however, our test riders did conclude that there was one option

that best balanced features and price. This shoe was affordable given the protection, had tacky traction on and off the bike, could hold up to abuse, had a comfortable fit, and was versatile for most riding styles. That shoe is the Sidi Dimaro. It offers just the right tech features, and although the rubber plate has a tendency to fold, the traction from the Vibram outsole on the pedals is superior to the traction of shoes that are only \$30-\$40 less. As we touched on at the start, most riders debate whether to go clipless or smash on flats. With the Dimaro, riders can take advantage of all the features they could want while still being able to decide if flat or clipless is right for the trail ahead. □

