

Gauging Grip, Fit, and Funk-fighting Ability

We followed a similar testing protocol and rating guidelines for the women's sailing sandal as we did for the men's (PS, June 2007) and women's (PS, July 2007) boat shoe tests. We evaluated each shoe on comfort, construction, foot protection, traction, and water retention. To assess comfort, we had a group of female testers wear each pair of sandals for an extended period of time and walk close to a mile in each pair, and then rate the sandal on comfort. We then averaged the testers' ratings.

The grip ratings were determined by using a traction-testing device based on inclined teak and nonskid fiberglass panels. We started each pair at an inclined angle of 20 degrees and progressed to greater inclines (30, 35, 40 degrees) to find out when each would lose traction with a tester wearing the sandals. We repeated the process with fresh water streaming down the surface (via a hose). For an overall grip rating, we averaged the results from the four tests.

We also wet the sandals with salt water and put them in a black plastic bag for a week to assess their resistance to odor and bacterial growth and stains.

The sandals were all well-made, drained easily, didn't retain water, and dried easily.

To gain a better understanding of shoe construction, we took a look at industry lingo—specifically in the footbed construction. (We got a little help from the folks at Cool Runnings, www.coolrunning.com.)

Many of the shoes we tested used a blended polyurethane/EVA material in construction. Running shoes are usually made with these foams, which are relatively lightweight, shock absorbent, flexible, and highly durable.

EVA is a copolymer or cross-linked foam made of ethylene and vinyl acetate. It is made up of thousands of foam cells that contain air or gas. When you compress (walk on) EVA foam, the gas gets pushed out and then sucked back in. Repeated impacts result in the EVA losing some resilience. To compensate, shoemakers use a compression-molded EVA midsole. This helps the EVA last longer and also provides structural integrity to the midsole.

Polyurethane can be heavier and denser. It is excellent foam, but it tends to have less "bounce" or rebound than EVA.

Today's best activewear shoes are often made with a combination of polyurethane and compression-molded EVA, drawing the benefits from both materials into one midsole.



PS's homemade grip testing device allowed sandals to be tested on wet and dry surfaces.

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