

FOOTWEAR TECHNOLOGY: DECATHLON

The latest footwear collection from Decathlon's Newfeel brand includes, for the first time, shoes specifically designed for Nordic walkers.



Walk this way

The sport of Nordic walking, in which participants use poles to exercise their upper body as well as their lower body, is an "excellent choice" for getting and staying in shape, according to French sports manufacturer and retail group Decathlon. The company says a Nordic walker employs between 80% and 90% of the muscles in their body while engaging in this activity. While sport walking only exercises the muscles in the lower part of the body, like those in the legs, the use of poles in Nordic walking for forward propulsion also

works out the upper body, including the shoulders, arms and core. Decathlon estimates that using the poles increases the work of the muscles in the upper body by 40%, as well as reducing the overall strain on the body.

The company sees Nordic walking as a growing outdoor activity. It is an efficient way to improve lung capacity; the company claims it is around 60% more effective than regular sport walking due to the position of the body when using the poles. Walkers using poles use 40% more energy than those who do not, making Nordic walking a good sport for those

Decathlon believes that not enough Nordic walkers are wearing shoes that meet the demands of the sport.

 Decathlon

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Sole searching

Supported by studies carried out at Decathlon's research and development centre, Newfeel's designers began to define the characteristics required in footwear for a Nordic walker. A key one of these was flexibility, so they incorporated a series of grooves into the sole of the shoes, carefully positioning them so that they complement the natural bend of the foot. It calls this feature Flex-H because the grooves form a 'H' shape.

Grip was also a priority as the sole of the shoe needs to be able to cope on a range of surfaces. Newfeel's engineers created a design that combines flat rubber and deep ridges to ensure sufficient grip on the varying terrain that walkers can encounter.

Beyond the performance qualities of the shoe, the brand recognised the importance of comfort and so cushioned zones were added in the areas that bear the brunt of the impact of each stride, specifically the heel and around the ball of the foot. This helps to absorb the repeated shocks the foot experiences. An

integrated gaiter prevents pebbles or gravel from getting into the shoe and there is a pocket for the laces to stop them from coming undone while the wearer is walking.

No limits

Decathlon states that, no matter the conditions or the pace at which the Nordic walker moves, the shoes will offer them all the "foot flexibility" they need. It has developed three different models; all three incorporate the design elements mentioned but with additional features depending on their anticipated use.

The Nordic Walk (NW) 500 model is designed for walkers seeking maximum comfort. As well as the Flex-H ridges and cushioning made from ethyl vinyl acetate (EVA), it also has a mesh upper that offers increased breathability.

The NW 580 is also designed for comfort, as well as being suitable for use in wet conditions. Decathlon claims the upper is completely impermeable to water, mud and dirt due to an "innovative treatment" that has been applied to it.

The NW 900 is intended for use in fast-paced Nordic walking. PU inserts in the sole give extra energy return to the walker each time the foot hits the ground. There are no seams on the upper to provide enhanced comfort and extra lateral supports to cope with the quicker pace. The upper is also breathable and water-resistant.

Decathlon hopes the options it has made available will allow all Nordic walkers to enjoy the activity, regardless of why, where and how they do it. It may even persuade some novices to pick up their poles and experience "the sense of well-being" that Decathlon says this outdoor sport brings. 

All of the shoes in the Nordic collection have H-shaped sole grooves, which are designed to complement the natural bend of the foot. The NW 500 model (left) has a mesh upper for added breathability, while the NW 900 (right) has extra lateral supports for walking at a faster pace.

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