

RUNNING SHOES

2020.

A HISTORY OF USER EXPERIENCE DESIGN





### Barefoot To Sandal

As home to the Olympiad, its no surprise that running was a central part of the life in Ancient Greece. The first 13 Olympiads consisted of just running, all of which originated as a barefoot spectacle. It wasn't until about 450 BC that sandals were spotted on some athletes who traveled from cooler climates. **The simple addition of the sole of the sandal increased ground traction and propelled the leg forward with greater efficiency.** As the sandaled runners began to win more often, athletes all began to adopt the use of sandals. At first there was some skepticism, but the notable performance enhancements quickly had shifted users perspective around wearing the to compete.

450 B C



### Spikes for Sprinting

Fast forward centuries and we find Adi Dassler—attributed with being the Father of the modern running shoe—creating running shoes for short to mid-distances. His early designs were still leather, but much more streamlined and included spikes built into the sole of the shoe for traction. These specialized shoes deviated from prior running shoes that were just regular shoes the user strapped traction to. **These shoes allowed the user a niche shoe that was easy to use and enhanced their performance, specifically traction and speed.**

1920



### Something for Everyone

New Balance's Trackster running shoe adapted multiple features to improve usability. As Metnal Itch notes, “...*the Trackster enhanced traction, absorbed shock, and prevented injuries, which were common with the metal spiked sprint shoes of that period*”. Essentially revolutionizing the concept that running could be improved not just by body mechanics, but by the functionality of a well designed product: running shoes. New Balance went further and understood that injury prevention and functionality was about fit as much as materials, so **for the first time ever the Trackster was available in multiple widths accommodating more runners than ever.**

1960



### Interactive

The grip of spikes became a thing of the past as synthetic upper and the sole of the shoe could be used on many surfaces. This was quite popular for both weekday and weekend joggers and those with bruised feet. Urethane soles became the new norm, and the use of running spikes would be a thing of the past. Grooved trainers did the trick, and athletes would be able to take advantage of the waffle sole design of the waffle sole. The small protruding bumps on the sole of the shoe adjusting form of traction. The use of metal spikes on the sole of the shoe to the surface being run on. The use of a runner was even able to adjust the form of the shoe to the surface being run on.

19





## Deploy accurate

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## Lighter & Brighter

The grip of spikes but gentler, the light  
synthetic upper and the multiple terrains it  
could be used on made the Waffle Trainer  
quite popular for both elite athletes, and  
weekend joggers suffering from bruised  
feet. Urethane tracks were becoming the  
new norm, and traditional running spikes  
would tear them up, but grooved trainers  
didn’t provide traction and athletes would  
slide. **The unique design of the waffle  
sole—which had small protruding  
bumps—was like a self-adjusting form of  
traction runners didn't get with metal  
spikes. Since it adapted well to the  
surface being run on the average runner  
was even able to find success.**



## Fashion + Function starts

Up until about the late 70’s running shoes  
were “*nothing more than laces and thin  
fabric*” according to one scholar. The  
focus on progressing to lighter shoes and  
traction based shoes that began to  
welcome use from others besides elite  
athletes was the predominant theme. **As  
running shoes began to fall into the  
average joe’s hands, the look and style  
of the shoe began to be of more  
concern to the consumer, and the big  
athletic brands took notice of the  
opportunity to give the consumer a  
product that met their fashion and  
average function needs.**



## Functional Fashion into the 80s

As the fashion forward trend of running  
shoes continued gaining traction into the  
80s, the user interaction was not as much  
focused on the usability of the shoe for  
performance running, rather, between the  
growth of running as a common sport, the  
accessibility and interest to watch elite  
athletes and therefore want to emulate  
them, coupled with a growing creative  
marketing field, **running shoes evolved  
into a lifestyle brand that was created  
for daily user interaction. Streamlined  
looks focused on visual design, not  
just technical design, were prominent  
to draw users to buy.** There was also a  
shift back to the use of leather versions.



## Interactive

With so much evolution  
mid distance and track  
there was more of a need  
could absorb the impact  
midsole during long runs  
running itself was no ne  
1980s was the era of th  
focused on elevating the c  
of distance running. Most  
launch of a gel vs air m  
today. Users now has  
functionally focused to a  
runners to feel confident  
longer runs and the impac  
on their bodies. The mid  
also brought a technical  
the heavy fashion era the

1960

1974

1970

1980

1990





## 1986

### Forward trend of running shoes gaining traction into the mainstream. The focus was not as much on the usability of the shoe for training, rather, between the shoe as a common sport, the interest to watch elite runners and therefore want to emulate them. With a growing creative focus, running shoes evolved into designs that were created for fashion. Streamlined looks and design not just technical but also drew users to them. There was also a shift back to leather versions.



## 1986

### Midsole Development

With so much evolution around short to mid distance and track based running there was more of a need for a shoe that could absorb the impact on the runner's midsole during long runs. While distance running itself was no new spectacle, the 1980s was the era of the midsole which focused on elevating the quality and comfort of distance running. Most notably was Asics launch of a gel vs air midsole, still in use today. **Users now had a shoe that was functionally focused to allow all levels of runners to feel confident and supported in longer runs and the impact those runs has on their bodies.** The midsole development also brought a technical aspect back after the heavy fashion-focused era they were following.



## 2005

### Back to Barefoot

As a nation became infatuated with the book *Born to Run*, Vibram capitalized on the sentiment and gave rise to FiveFinger toe shoes in the running world. It peaked the interest of, and **gave a unique option to users who wanted the barefoot experience without the pain and dirt of actually being barefoot on all terrains.** The initial interest gained traction coming off the era of built up midsoles, cushion and support. While users who embraced the 5 toe articulation loved the product, **the lack of shock absorption, support, the need to train into using them to avoid injury, and the inability to really fit all feet well, made their usability less than optimal in the long run.**



## 2019

### Endless Options

Today's running shoe landscape is the culmination of lightweight materials meeting functionality, comfort and fashion forward design. The 'athleisure' movement has everyone reaching for sneakers both in day to day and fitness. The running shoe evolution is one that has taken a specific item with one limited functioned, and **evolved the functional design, materials and aesthetic in a way that the user can now seamlessly integrate a running shoe into day to day life and without looking out of place, or being uncomfortable.** The user now has the luxury of choice in their running shoe allowing them to fit their exact preferences *and* needs.

What will 2020+ bring for the UX of modern running shoes?

# List of Resources

PICTURES + CONTENT

<https://www.adidas-group.com/en/group/history/>

<https://www.24life.com/a-brief-history-of-running/>

<http://upandhumming.com/tag/vintage-running-shoes/>

<https://www.vox.com/2016/3/25/11290566/running-lifetime>

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<https://www.highsnobiety.com/2017/03/30/nike-waffle-trainer-history/>

<http://feetandtheolympics.blogspot.com/2008/04/history-of-foot-race.html>

<https://www.complex.com/sneakers/2013/06/the-defining-running-shoes-of-the-70s>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/23/style/roger-federer-on-running-sneaker-deal.html>

