



Field Tested

PROS

- Performance-oriented
- Good all-around shoe

CONS

- Hard to break in

BEST FOR

- Hard sport climbing, gym climbing, some trad climbing

routes. Surprisingly, the Skwama does pretty well in crack-climbing scenarios. They won't be your go-to for desert splitters, but they'd certainly be a good option for trad climbs that have a few crack pitches or a mix of cracks and edging.

The Skwama gets its sensitivity from a relatively soft midsole with a cutout underfoot that allows the rubber to flex and spread when under pressure. La Sportiva claims this feature reduces edge deformation and increases smearing/edging precision. For the record, the shoe edges and smears extremely well. The Skwama locks in heel-hooking power using what they term "S-Heel" construction, intended to keep your heel into a snugly fitted cup that doesn't deform when pulling. La Sportiva also utilizes their P3 rand system for this shoe, designed and proven to keep the downturned toe profile stable over time. And the mega swath of super sticky rubber across the toe aids in jams, seams and groin-stretching toe-hooks.

The only complaint in testing these shoes was that they required two or three sessions to break in. The heel cup fits beautifully, but is definitely tight on the Achilles at first. And as with any slipper, you'll have to pull hard the first few times you put them on. But La Sportiva avoids any real hassle with a touch of extra leather under the ankle bones that expands just enough to get the Skwama on without toppling your chair. A single strap of Velcro tightens across the top of the foot to ensure the shoe's overall fit remains super secure. The leather upper did stretch over the first two weeks of use, but not enough that I would have sized down.

Bottom line for the La Sportiva Women's Skwama: A killer performance shoe with great versatility and a high comfort factor.

—Kelsey Brasseur

PROS

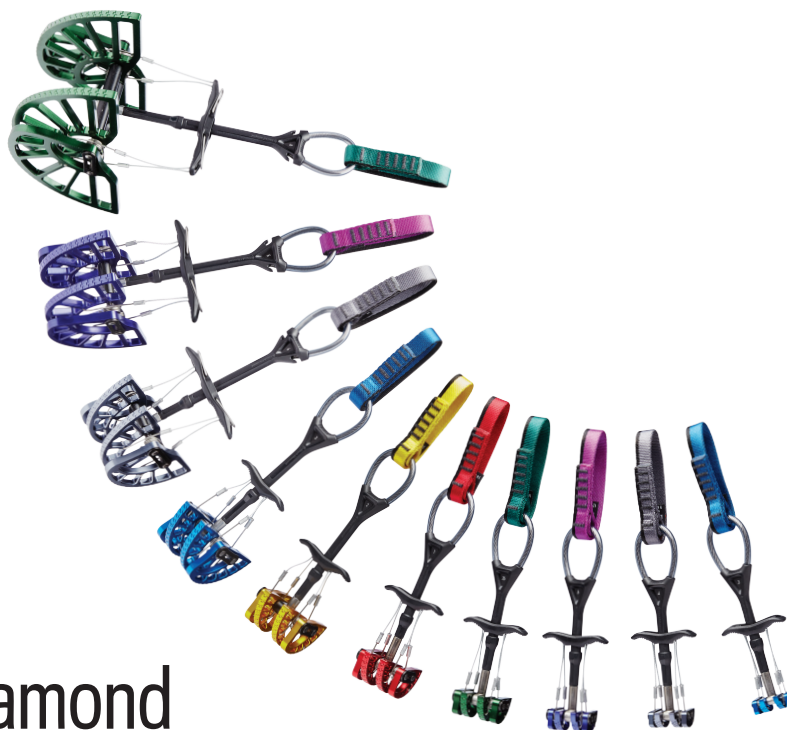
- Affordable; new trigger keeper on bigger sizes

CONS

- not sold as a set, but 10% discount for 4 or more

BEST FOR

- Everything



Black Diamond (New) C4 Camalots

\$65 to \$125 (depending on size) / blackdiamondequipment.com

Black Diamond's Ultralight Camalots

were a game-changer when they came out in 2016: You could carry nearly four pieces for the same weight as three of the previous-generation Camalots.

So while we still have the Ultralights on our wish list, the newly redesigned classic Camalot C4s are where you really get that bang for your buck. Not only are they lighter on the rack than their predecessors, they're lighter on the wallet than the Ultralights: a set of .4 to 4 is \$255 cheaper than the ULs.

An entire set of the new C4s, .3 to 6, is about 10 percent lighter than a full complement of previous generation C4s. Black Diamond shaved grams by "sculpting" the lobes and adding holes in strategic ways that still maintain the same kN strength.

The coolest new feature of the redesign is the trigger keeper present in the big sizes—#4, #5 and #6. It's kind of like one of those K-Cup coffee makers—you didn't know you needed it until you had it. Easy to use and less messy than going without. When you're jangling up a route that requires the kitchen sink, the trigger keepers hold the lobes in the retracted position where they tangle less with other gear and are less bothersome when you move. Further, if you're about to start up a miserable wide

route the likes of which no one but Bob Scarpelli could love, armed with a whole bouquet of the new purple #5 and green #6 C4s, you'll no longer feel like you need a "Caution: Wide Load" sign. Releasing the trigger keeper to place the large cams can be a bit of a jolt, as the cam lobes snap open rather violently, but thus far I've yet to have any snafus with the keeper getting caught.

I've tested these new Camalots on hard sandstone—like that of Eldorado Canyon—and some Colorado granite of less-than-Yosemite quality, and they bite just as reliably as my old C4s. The action is also smoother, and the four fully-colored cam lobes (versus only two colored ones on the older versions) help you more readily visually ID the sizes.

Another selling point is the new cams' wider trigger. When viewed side-by-side with the older C4s, the increased trigger width is clear, though in practice the difference is subtle.

But then again, I'm already sold: Between the lighter weight, the trigger keeper, and the sleek new look—all on top of the same functionality that made the earlier generation my go-to cams, the new C4 Camalot is bound to become a climber favorite.

—Michael Levy