



PROS

- Superb edging
- Sport climbing all around

CONS

- Somewhat shallow heel cup
- Not ideal for for toe-hooking

La Sportiva Testarossa 2.0

\$199 | www.sportiva.com

Downturned, asymmetric and a supple midsole.

A good car won't fix a bad driver, but it'll certainly make it harder for the bad driver to mess up. Likewise, the La Sportiva Testarossas will arguably improve your footwork. Their Goldilock construction makes them top-notch at edging, while still managing a soft, responsive feel. They're branded as best on steep routes and hard bouldering, but I'd argue they'll be your go-to pair for hard sport climbing on any route that requires precision, with a few exceptions.

The shoe's real star power is the rand, midsole and toe-box design. The patented figure-8 slingshot (a split mid-shoe, rand-tension system that maximizes toe power) allows you to stand on the thinnest of edges. The midsole, which I'd rate at a three on a scale of 10 in stiffness, is still soft enough to offer feedback. Surprisingly, that softness also makes the shoes decent for smearing as well. And the toe box itself is made with a 3D Hytrel anatomical insert, which also serves to increase toe power by driving forces to the front of the shoe.

Originally released in 2003, the Testarossa 2.0 offers an updated heel cup, with more rubber coverage and a new design to better distribute pressure. The updates are a big improvement for those with narrow heels. The new heel sticks and will get the job done, although it's still a bit shallow for my liking.

The shoe is constructed with 3.5 mm Vibram XS Grip 2 rubber and the upper is a combination of Lorica, a non-stretch synthetic, and leather. The shoe won't give much in terms of stretch. After wearing them on a variety of terrain, from steep, glossy Rifle classics to vertical, pockety Shelf Road nail-biters, the rubber has worn evenly, although there's still plenty of mileage left.

In exchange for a precise fit via the laces that go all the way to the toe, this shoe is lacking in the toe-rubber department. They will not be great for aggressive or comp-style toe-hooking. And despite the fact that they perform excellently on crimping slab routes, they are not ideal for lay routes that are, say, over 100 feet. The aggressive construction will leave your feet begging to be released on long, lower-angle climbs.

At \$200, these shoes are not cheap. But the performance you'll get out of them will speak for itself. Fit true to size, but I'd recommend sizing a full number down from your other La Sportiva shoes.

—Delaney Miller



PROS

- Durable; lasts a long time
- Smooth, comfortable handling

CONS

- Plastic end-caps fall off

Sterling Quest 9.6

\$256 (70m, standard) | www.sterlingrope.com

There's no need to wear a tuxedo to the office (particularly if you're working from home), but you don't want to show up in a ratty t-shirt either. You want something that's performance-oriented with a little pizzazz, something you can dress up or down: You want the Hawaiian shirt of ropes. The Quest, a new 9.6 mm rope from Sterling, is just that. You can take it on multipitch trad climbs or use it sport cragging over and over, and it'll hold up.

The Quest 9.6 is a newer version of Sterling's Velocity 9.8. While both are billed as "workhorse" ropes and designed to withstand the wear and tear or frequent use, the Quest ups the ante with slightly lower-diameter core—achieved through a different twist and heat treatment of the core strands—that make the cord thinner overall. The weight savings are minimal. At about 9.25 pounds the Quest is roughly a third of a pound lighter than the Velocity.

The Quest was noticeably more supple right out of the package than Sterling's Ion R 9.4, one of the company's highest performance and lightest ropes that I used much of last year. The Quest stayed flexible as I broke it in, without ever getting undesirably soft.

I've usually thought of my workhorse rope as a 9.8 because of the durability offered by a fatter rope, but also because of how well it handles. The Quest 9.6 is still right in that sweet spot for me. It works with any standard belay device, and compared to supermodel-skinny 8.6-mm- and lower-diameter ropes, it's easy to grab and manipulate. The sheath glides smoothly without feeling slippery in your hand. Also, despite being slimmer than the Velocity, the Quest is rated for eight UIAA falls versus the Velocity's six. The likelihood of taking eight falls that generate the kind of forces created in UIAA tests (approaching factor-2 realm) is remote to impossible, but it's nice to know the Quest is as robust as it is.

At this point, I've taken generous whips on the Quest, used it on sharp limestone and in super dusty, sandy conditions, and it still hasn't softened anywhere or fuzzed up. My one complaint is that the little plastic caps fell off and the cauterized parts of the sheath at each end have cracked so that the core is threatening to wiggle out.

At \$256 for a 70-meter standard Quest (dry-treated version available for \$300), the rope is reasonably priced. Just like your Hawaiian shirt, the Quest looks good and feels good. Whether you pair it with your trad rack or with quickdraws, it's a solid option.

—Michael Levy



Asolo Eiger XT EVO

\$625 | www.asolo.com

The pandemic that kept us caged and steering clear of each other as if we had the plague has at least taught me to appreciate normal, small things. Frothy espresso sputtering from the stainless-steel nostril of the machine. The incessant crowing, even at 2:00 in the afternoon, of neighbor Bill's rooster. A jaunt up the *Speedway*, a 1,000-foot varnish of ice over rock on the canyon wall down the road from the village. Only four months ago these things passed unnoticed. Now, I appreciate them like heartbeats.

Even in ordinary times I would appreciate the Asolo Eiger XT EVO, a model similar in name to the boot it replaces, the Asolo Eiger GV, but so reimagined that its only shared DNA is the brand name. The new Eiger joins Asolo's trifecta of teched-up boots that includes the Manaslu 8000 GV and the Mont Blanc GV. The three boots all have a carbon-fiber footbed, integrated gaiter, Fastlock closure, and synthetic uppers. The key differential across the boots is warmth. The Manaslu 8000 GV is the warmest, for high-altitude mountaineering; the Mont Blanc GV is the midweight, for winter mixed and ice; and the Eiger XT Evo is the flyweight, for ice and alpine. The Manaslu 8000 GV and the Mont Blanc GV are slated for reviews at later dates.

Weighing one pound 8.8 ounces per boot (size 42), the Eiger XT EVO could wear the crown for "world's lightest," yet, magically, it doesn't skimp on features. The upper is over-the-ankle and made of four materials including Gore-Tex. Ankle flex is good and doesn't hinder sidestepping, and the soft-feeling boot doesn't crush your feet on approaches. Underfoot the Eiger uses the Vibram Litebase sole, a ply that is about 50 percent thinner than typical soles. There's less heavy rubber underfoot, so the boot gets lighter yet retains deep lugs—other thin-



PROS

- Lightest ice and alpine boot made (1 pound 8.8 ounces per boot)
- Precise and agile
- Carbon fiber midsole make boot stiff heel to toe
- Integrated, waterproof gaiter
- For technical mixed and ice, and just moving fast in the mountains

CONS

- Spendy

soled boots I've used are slippery because the lugs are shallow. A waterproof zipper seals the gaiter. I'll note that waterproof zippers only survive the long haul if you keep them clean. Dust or grit in the teeth can split the zipper, and replacing a blown zipper can be impossible. I wipe my zippers clean, never force them, and pull the sides of the gaiter close together when zipping, to prevent stress.

I started this article with the *Speedway*, a modest and ordinary line that has a kitchen sink of terrain: rock moves, snow, verglas, ice steps. There's even a squeeze chimney. Conditions on the east-facing wall often suck, and getting up it before the sun rots it means moving like you're on fire. Wearing light boots puts a fat finger on the scales in your favor.

The Eiger XT EVO isn't just light, it's the most nimble ice and alpine boot I've ever worn, and is absolutely stiff, rock-solid heel to toe. A sculpted, deep heel dish is as snug as a Formula 1 cockpit. There's no slop in these boots. Add up the parts, and the sum is razor edging, and front-pointing with minimal foot and calf fatigue even on fearsome vertical ice.

I wore the Eiger XT EVO in just about every condition down to zero, and my feet were

never cold or wet even when water gushed over the boots without my permission. I'll qualify, I used the Eiger mostly on routes where I was either in constant motion, or the belay sessions were short. I would hesitate to lace on the Eiger for very cold, long routes where you spend significant time immobile at belays, or it's just really damn cold. For those conditions, I'd opt for a more insulated boot, and this coming winter that will be the Mont Blanc GV.

Like I said near the beginning, the Eiger doesn't cut any corners, and that applies to the price tag. The \$625 cost dents the pocketbook, but is competitive relative to similar lightweight synthetic boots with integrated gaiters. Advances in design and technology are seldom cheap and always worth it—you don't, after all, still use a flip phone, now do you?

The politicians say that they might have a vaccine for the pandemic sometime around January. Maybe February. Until then I'll wear a mask, scrub my hands, continue with my hermitage, and bask in every rooster crow and climb.

—Duane Raleigh