



La Sportiva Theory

\$190

To be honest, I really, really liked these shoes. And I don't say "really" often, much less twice.

The new La Sportiva Theories can be described in three words: Soft. Supple. Slipper. The other day while wearing them in Rifle, when I felt my foot starting to slide on one of the myriad of glossy blocks, all I had to do was curl my toes to stop the otherwise inevitable slip.

The Theory was crafted as a part of La Sportiva's Olympic Trio, along with the Solution Comp and the Cobra 4:99. Specifically, the Theory was curated for modern bouldering (read: volume hopping and parkour-style moves). It's made with a combination of La Sportiva's No Edge and edge technology, which amounts to an edge at the toe and no edge on the sides of the shoe, allowing today's plastic pullers to easily roll on and off volumes, while still maintaining some (not much) edging ability.

The shoe is constructed with La Sportiva's most aggressive, asymmetrical last—the P85—which helps the climber dig into holds or hook onto volumes. The heel cup is low volume and narrow, and a slingshot rand locks it in nicely. The toe box, or rather the entire front-half of the shoe, is encased in rubber that ranges from 1.9 to 4 millimeters of Vibram XS Grip-2 (Vibram's softest). Added touches: the shoe has a split-sole construction, contributing to the shoe's flexibility, plus no footbed, enhancing sensitivity.

Despite being marketed for indoor bouldering, the Theories are excellent for sport climbing on slippery limestone, and to some extent, pockety sandstone. After six or so pitches, you'll be psyched to take these puppies off, especially if it's hot and your feet swell.

As a female climber with feet on the narrow side, I went with the women's version (which is a welcome black and hibiscus color). It's been several months of testing and they still stick to my toes so perfectly that after undoing the Velcro strap and removing the heel cup, I have to pry the things off. Expect very little stretch. Size according to your Testarossas, or about a whole number size down from your Solutions.

The outer soles are wearing, but plenty of mileage is left. At \$190, they're not cheap, but that seems to be the going rate for nice soft shoes these days, and you get what you pay for.

—Delaney Miller



Grivel Dark Machine

\$419.99

Light, mean and versatile, the Dark Machine is Grivel's newest tool in their "Machine" line—which also includes the Tech Machine, North Machine and Light Machine—and it is the most technical ice tool of the bunch.

The Dark Machine's shaft is a carbon-aluminum composite while the handle is full carbon fiber. At 490 grams, it is among the lightest technical tools on the market—for comparison, the Petzl Nomic and the Black Diamond Cobra are each around 580 grams. Despite its lightness, the Dark Machine slices through hard ice like butter. It does require a bit more umph than a heavier tool to generate the necessary force, but the energy saved from the lighter weight more than offsets the additional power required. A high balance-point far up the shaft, combined with the light weight, is why it penetrates so well. At the apex of your swing, the tool feels head-heavy, as though it wants to swing back like a pendulum—almost as if it has pick weights, though it doesn't.

The 3-millimeter, hot-forged steel pick has a complement of gradually longer teeth the closer you get to the shaft and positively eats ice. I only had the pick glance off the clearest bullet-hard blue ice I've ever climbed in northern Norway. If you're diligent about sharpening and only take off the thinnest shavings of metal, these picks should last a long time.

The Dark Machine performs well on mixed terrain—with a similar curve to that of the Petzl Nomic, it can handle a wide variety of ice and rock of varying steepness—but if you're planning on mainly tackling dry-tooling routes, opt for the Dark Machine X, which has an even more recessed handle.

The only major "inconvenience" in the design is the lack of a rubberized handle. Since most climbers these days customize their tool handles by wrapping them with electrical tape or some other grippy material, Grivel thought that they might as well provide a blank canvas, which means you *have* to tape the handle.

At \$419.99, the Dark Machine ain't cheap, but it's on par with other carbon-fiber tools. It is a major step up for Grivel, a company with heaps of history, and the Dark Machines deserve to be in the conversation about the best ice tools out there.

—Michael Levy