



RENTAL FLEET SHOES- CHOOSING THE BEST FOR YOUR WALL

Research , testing and
comparison
focusing on climbing
rental models

There are more than a dozen companies out there, all competing for your rental shoe budget. Most claim that their rental shoes are 'the best'. With all the confusion, this study sets out to answer, in an independent manner, just that question:

Which are the best rental shoes on the market?

SUMMARY

(my final say)

Boreal - Without a North American distributor, customer service has been disrupted. A relatively expensive, average quality shoe.

Bufo -If I was buying a stock of rental shoes this would be my first choice - without hesitation. The patented Unbreakable is virtually indestructible, is well priced, climbs very well and is the only shoe on the market built with solely gyms in mind.

Evolv - Their motto , I think, is "Buy Evolv inexpensively, use them 'til they wear out, throw them away and buy some more." Right out of the box the very thin rand was already peeling, and I don't think the fabric uppers will hold up to the abuse of the indoor scene. They are cheap to purchase and customer service is one of the best, but you'll be replacing your stock frequently. Poor ROI. 5-10 - A good performer. Friendly customer service. A fine boot, BUT could be better with more attention given to overall product quality standards. Total Quality Design (Japanese Kaizen concept) could be higher, and price could definitely be more reasonable.

La Sportiva - Like Boreal, one of the early sticky soled boots. Much better customer service than Boreal due to a North American outlet. Also a fairly expensive rental model for average durability.

Mad Rock -Customer service was initially terrible. I did, eventually, find one rep who was pleasant, and willing to help me. The shoes look great, but quality stops there. Rubber is too soft, and the shoe was the least durable and least suited to a gym setting. Maybe a good retail sport shoe, but for a rental - no way! Cut out the advertising hype and Mad Rock for a gym is just that - madness.

Mammut - I liked the look of the boot but the quality of the leather upper is poor, and there was a strong odor emanating out from the new boots. Feedback from quite a number of gym managers have said this model does not hold up. (This from the most expensive of all the models in my study!)

Saltic -- Great customer service, good quality shoe, but again, priced quite high. Next to Bufo, the only other rental of exquisite beauty and super high quality construction. For a single rand boot their rubber also wore quite well and performed admirably.

So, *"Which is the best rental boot to buy?"*

Based on the overall results of my testing and the feedback received from gyms surveyed:

- #1 - Bufo Unbreakable
- #2 - Saltic Eso
- #3 - 5-10 Summit
- #4 - Boreal Ace
- #5 - La Sportiva Cliff
- #6 - Mammut Bulldozer
- #7 - Evolv Quest
- #8 - Mad Rock Flash

Note: There are other brands available that have not been tested in this study. Reason: They didn't want to participate. Make your own conclusions about that. The results and opinions of this study are mine and not those of any organization or group affiliation. All results should be evaluated by the user and determination of merit based there-on. Be prudently critical, yet think about what I was trying to achieve with the study. A good investment is all about the satisfaction of your customers, and the best return for your dollar.

Some comments returned with completed surveys:

"La Sportiva Enduo and Cliffs- the toe rand lasted six weeks due to a large number of beginners"

"(Mad Rock) rubber came off rapidly from outdoor use, and wore quickly inside as well"

"(Bufo's) only pitfall is stiffness in the toe"

"I have spoken with 5-10 about (the problems with the Summit) and they aren't interested in fixing it"

"The Triop Sambas just did not hold up... we may have gotten 6 months out of (them)"

"Bufo knows exactly what gym operators want when they built (the Unbreakable)"

"We started with the 5-10 Summits and have been very disappointed with the durability"

"We also have some (Climbingshoes.com) 'Kermits'- not impressed"

"The Mammuts are not very sturdy"

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER - David Sweetland

Dave has been involved in the climbing industry most his life. He is a long time climber, previous manager of an indoor climbing facility and a Technical Rep, for Sport Rock Wall Manufacturing. As an avid writer, Dave also does freelance writing for Rock and Ice, Rockclimbing.com and other grass roots publications. He's an active member with Outdoor Wilderness Leaders Coalition and Solid Rock CFC. Dave has also been an instructor with Outward Bound and a leader with the Sierra Club. His life-time involvement in the sport of rock climbing has given him the knowledge, sense and desire required to carry out a study such as this. Dave lives in California, USA and continues to climb regularly.

Industry Survey Results

Compilation of survey sent to 70 gyms across North America. Sample represents 15% of population.

	Quality Craftsmanship	Overall Durability	Price vs Value	Comfort and Fit	Client Satisfaction	Customer Service	Return on Investment	Company Friendliness	Delivery / Supply	Special Rental Features	TOTAL CUSTOMER RANKING (out of a possible 50)
Scarpa	5	3	3	3	3	4	3	3	3	0	30
Five Ten	3	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	27
Bufo	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	48
Mad Rock	1	1	3	3	3	1	3	1	3	0	19
La Sportiva	5	5	2	4	4	4	3	3	3	0	33
Evolv	2	1	3	3	3	3	5	1	4	4	28
Saltic	5	4	2	3	3	3	4	3	5	4	33
Boreal	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	20
Mammut	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	1	4	23
Climbshoes.com	3	4	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	3	25
Triop	3	2	3	3	2	3	3	2	2	1	22
Acopa	1	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	0	19
EB	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	21

Why Test?

As any gym manager will concur, the climbing market is full of companies all promising (with few delivering) the best shoe for your rental fleet. As obvious and confusing, are the huge variances in price, quality and durability between the brands. My research, which has taken 6 months to complete, seeks to test and evaluate each line and then outlay the results in a way that is clear, objective and free of brand ideology.

This study was founded on my 20 plus years experience in the industry, keen interest in shoe construction, curiosity about shoe costs, and a desire to create / calculate a wear-cost analysis that is accurate for my colleagues in the indoor rock climbing wall industry. The data provided will allow each user the ability to wisely and confidently choose between the best fleet shoes.

Participants:

Saltic, Evolv, Bufo and Mammut all contributed free demos for this study. Acopa, 5-10, La Sportiva, Red Chili, and Mad Rock were willing to participate but demos had to be purchased. Boreal, EB, and Rock Pillars would not respond to any participation requests via e-mail or phone, regarding this study. These are the models I ended up with (as per each company's suggested rental model) were: 510 Summit, Mad Rock Flash, Bufo Unbreakable, La Sportiva Cliff, Saltic Eso, Boreal Ace (which I purchased retail), Mammut Bouldozer and Evolv Quest.

Industry Survey:

What better way to get information about each model than to ask those who have used it? I thought this input would represent others' feedback, rather than just my own. I sent a survey to seventy climbing facilities across America and Canada. I wanted to know what gyms thought about each of the rental models. I asked these gyms to rank the models they had used, as well as send me any comments they wanted to submit. I took the average of all the responses (this way no company got penalized if not every gym had used it) and compiled them. Results are included.

Testing Procedures:

The findings here are my independent work. Every attempt to be fair and accurate - yet REAL and brutally honest - has been made.

All models were subjected to the same tests and procedure:

1. Customer Service, Cooperativeness and friendliness:

Not really a test, but as service is very important with any purchase I felt it necessary to rate the overall helpfulness and courtesy of all companies..

2. Craftsmanship:

Upon receiving the models I gave each an initial assessment. I was looking for quality of workmanship such as glue slop, pull tab threads, stitching etc. After rand and de-lam testing I re-rated this to include durability.

3. Toe Rand Wear Test:

Gym climbers are notorious for foot dragging, therefore a need for a heavy toe rand. I brutalized the shoes by grinding each model at a consistent 40psi with an eight inch, #3 Nicholson rasp. My goal was to keep track of the number of actions it took to blow through the toe rand (One action = 1 forward and return stoke at constant 40lbs of pressure)

4. Sole De-lamination:

There's nothing worse than a poor glue job and early separation. I tried to peel away the soles with a half inch flat bit steel driver at 40psi. I then calibrated how much de-lam each of the models displayed. Not a real elaborate methodology but it did reveal enough of a de-lamination factor for the study.

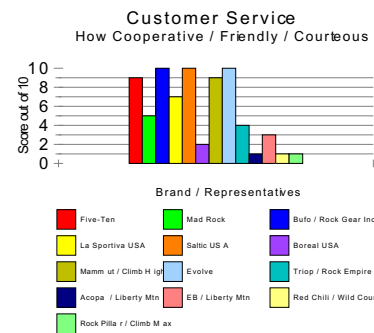
5. Durability and Return on Investment:

The facts you need: I've used the figures from the above tests to get the Overall Durability, Rental Fleet Costs, and Return on Investment figures.

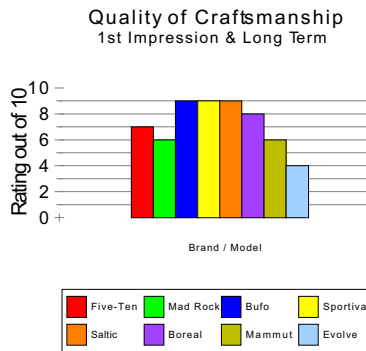
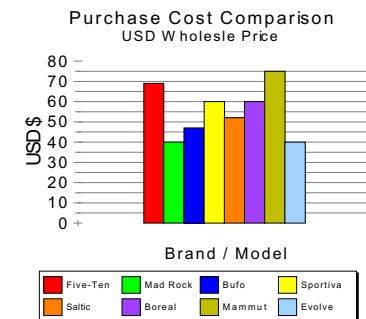
Testing Results:

Testing result graphs for each brand are compiled on the following pages.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

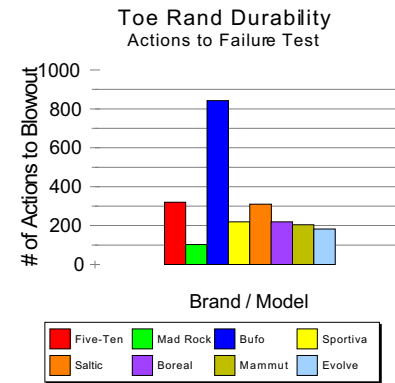


I was impressed with customer service from Saltic, Mammut, Evolv, Bufo, and 5-10. They were professional, friendly and helpful. Customer service is crucial - I, personally, would hesitate to do business with Mad Rock or Red Chili based upon the poor service I received. Same with Boreal, Rock Pillars and EB who gave me NO service at all.



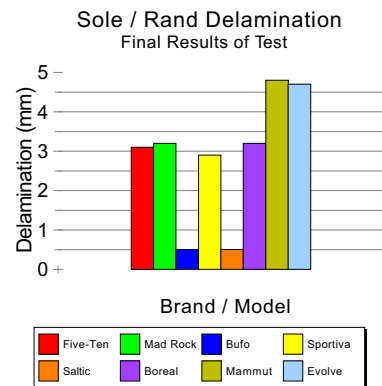
Out of the box: Saltic was the cleanest of all the models received. Bufo gave the best first impression- double toe rand- wow! The Mad Rock Flash looked, well- Flash but suspect for durability. Sportiva and Boreal were, as seems to be the case with most Euro made gear, solid looking shoes. All the other models had noticeable quality issues (sloppy glue jobs, poor stitching, or looked cheap to begin with)...Long Term Craftsmanship: read on...

TESTING RESULTS



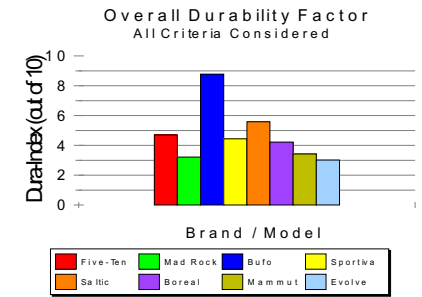
The Variance in the results for this key test were shocking. Without any question, toe rand failure is the single biggest factor contributing to the death of a rental fleet shoe. It is clearly evident that some brands are just flogging shoes at the gym market without any consideration for the demands which exist therein. Others are quite the opposite - you decide which are which. Even after 840 wear actions, the Bufo Unbreakable still hadn't burned a hole through... Having already beat all the other models by 500 actions I felt I didn't need to spend the rest of the day there- Point made. Mad Rock broke down first- after only 103! (and that's their newer, more durable formula). Evolv second after 182. Boreal & Mammut went next near the 200 mark. Saltic, La Sportiva, and 5-10 blew out at just over 300.

Lets assume that one action of my rasp is equal to about 2 climbs in the gym by your average foot dragging, toe scraping beginner climber. Feel free to figure those numbers on your own - It's certainly eye-opening. I'll use those numbers to calculate how much you are paying each time you rent out a pair of your shoes. See Chart on 'Rental Fleet Costs'.

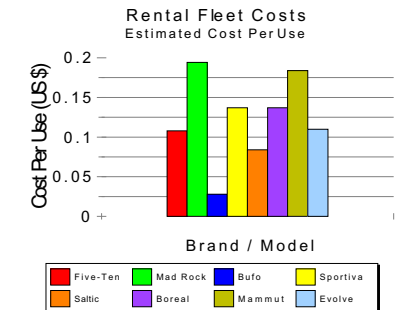


Obviously no matter how durable the rubber, how perfect the fit, how comfortable the shoe, how much it costs, or how beautiful it is to look at, if the sole of your rental de-lams - it's worthless. Because your rental model takes such a severe beating, it's got to be put together REALLY well. Hence the de-lam test. And here's how the soles of these models stood up: I think if I would of continued with the Evolv, I could of de-soled the shoe right there and then. Mammut gluing was just as bad. Sportiva, Boreal, 5-10 and Mad-Rock brands held up pretty much the same (ie: not great). Bufo and Saltic were by far the sturdiest - That Czech glue is superb!

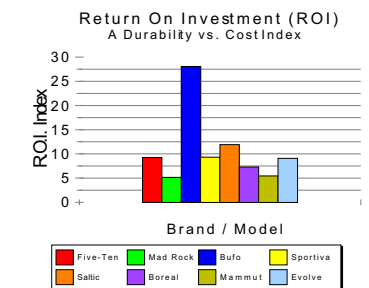
WHAT THIS MEANS



So here's the bottom line: which is the most durable rental model- all criteria considered. I used the Toe Rand Durability, Sole De-lamination figures and craftsmanship rating to get the durability index. Brands are rated from 1 (being the poorest, or least durable), to 10 being bomber. Surprisingly, most models came in between 3 and 5 out of 10. Except the Czechs, who, again showed their superior craftsmanship and durability. Bufo was clearly the outright winner (no doubt due to their patented double toe-rand) with the most durable model. Mad Rock and Evolv came in last place with Mammut close behind.



How much does it cost you to rent out a pair of boots? By dividing the whole-sale cost by the number of uses (toe rand figures times two), we get an idea of the cost per use. A good figure for those people who think because the shoes are cheaper to purchase, they are getting a better deal, or those who think that expensive things are better quality. Afraid Not. A Mammut or Mad Rock rental will run you about 17 cents per use. Boreal and Sportiva: 13 cents per use. 5-10 and Evolv will both cost about 11 cents per use, Saltic about 8 cents and a Bufo rental costs you a mere 3 cents!



What are you getting for what you pay for? Most of the brands give you about the same return for your investment. You pay less for some, and get less; pay more for others but get a bit more. While Mad Rock and Evolv are the cheapest to purchase, they certainly give you little bang for your buck. And although the Bufo model is the second least expensive, it gives you more return than anything else - hands down.