

## Running in these shoes is like running on soft sand, which is great for body tone. They had an impact through the rest of my body – I noticed muscles that I hadn't felt before

Jane Hughes on how Masai nomads inspired a training shoe

**W**hen Bruce Hildebrand ran the London marathon earlier this year, his technique – and his footwear – may have raised a few eyebrows. For while Bruce, 26, completed the 26 miles in four hours and six minutes, he did so at a “rolling trot”, in trainers that looked more like moonboots than running shoes. Bruce, a former personal trainer turned Pilates instructor, is a convert to a new form of footwear, Masai Barefoot Technology (MBT). The shoes, which were designed to improve posture and build muscle strength, have soft, wedge-like heels that help the wearer to walk or run in a more active way. This involves gently rolling through the foot from the heel, before pushing off from the toes. Leg and postural muscles work harder and, as they become stronger, are better able to support the joints and protect them from shock.

“I liked the theory behind the shoes and they’ve been excellent for training because they helped me to focus on the quality of my running,” says Bruce. “I could see an improvement in my technique because I was using

my feet correctly and my ankle joints were working in a better way.”

Bruce decided to road-test the shoes in the marathon because he thought they would ease the stress on his joints caused by pounding along miles of Tarmac. They did, but he admits to struggling in the last six miles, as he had to work so much harder. “Running in these shoes is like running on soft sand, which is great for body tone. But by the end of the race, all my postural muscles were feeling very fatigued.”

Many international sports people now use the shoes for training or to overcome injury. Bruce thinks they are hugely beneficial for runners suffering from shin splints (when the shins become inflamed through too much pressure, usually when running on hard surfaces). “The shoes make you use the muscles in your lower legs more evenly,” he says. “The discomfort I’d felt in my shins disappeared after I started wearing them.”

Bruce had been given initial training in how to use the shoes and gradually built up the amount of time he wore them for. “Once I got into the swing of them, they automatically had an

impact through the rest of my body,” he says. “I remember noticing muscles that I hadn’t felt before and I had more stretch in my calves. I found the shoes so comfortable that by April I was wearing them every day.”

MBT footwear was invented by Swiss engineer and former semi-professional footballer Karl Müller, who suffered from back, knee and Achilles tendon problems. His research showed that normal flat shoes encourage passive, lazy walking and postural slumping. People also tend to overstep by tilting the pelvis forward, arching the back and falling into their next step.

However, Müller knew that Masai nomads in Africa – known for their relaxed, upright and lengthened stance – don’t have the same postural problems. Walking barefoot on uneven surfaces, they roll through their feet naturally as they walk.

MBT works by mimicking the unevenness of natural ground with a curved cushion sole. This encourages

the foot to roll and the core stabilising muscles – pelvic floor, abdominal transverse and deep back and buttock – to work harder. According to the UK importer, Pilates expert Helga Fisher, the shoes have multiple benefits. “Walking on hard, flat surfaces causes thousands of little shocks and compressions to our joints and spine every day. MBT encourages the wearer to take shorter steps and walk more upright. This not only reduces the risk of injury but also improves

circulation and breathing and eases muscle tension.”

In effect, the shoes can work like a personal mini gym, improving fitness and helping weight loss, as Della Keighley, 38, discovered. Della had always had weight problems and put on 2st while waiting for a back operation. When she began to think about exercising again, her physio recommended Pilates as a way of building muscles to support her back – and she decided to buy the shoes as well. Her posture improved as soon as



Bruce Hildebrand with his MBT trainers

### PHOBIA OF THE WEEK: EREMOPHOBIA

**Fear of being oneself** But think how much worse it could be



she began to wear them and there were other unexpected benefits.

"I had been walking very badly because of my back but the shoes helped me to stand better, so that I looked as though I had lost weight straight away," she says. "Feeling more confident about how I looked encouraged me to carry on, and over the next seven months, I lost 10lb."

Della, who is 5ft 8in and now weighs 12st, was aware of feeling a pull in her thighs and buttocks when she wore the shoes, but she was surprised when she began to see a physical difference. "My body shape has gradually changed. My upper thighs are slimmer and my trousers are now baggy round the bottom. I hadn't expected this at all and it was a real plus."

She now wears the shoes three days a week and gets a double workout if she walks the dog at the same time. "I'd like to lose more weight but I feel much better and everybody says I look happier," she says. ●

Masai Barefoot Technology Footwear (from £112) is available from 01273 273555, [masaibyfisher@hotmail.com](mailto:masaibyfisher@hotmail.com)



GETTY IMAGES

## REGIMEN

Ian Walker, 32, America's Cup challenge yachtsman

**Weight:** 11st  
**Height:** 5ft 11in



**Your role as skipper of GBR Challenge**

**doesn't seem the most physical: is it?**

It's important that I am as light as possible because we have a crew weight limit and it is better to have the weight in muscle on the grinders. I concentrate on long duration fat-burning rather than weightlifting. I have the lowest body-fat percentage in the team.  
**How do you stay focused?**

By breaking down the race into small, achievable goals. Anything not related to performance must be shut out from the mind. It is also important to wind down quickly when you are not racing, so that you save your mental energy. On the way to the start we often play cards or tell stories and have a laugh.

**Do you have to take extra care of certain muscles?**

Sailing is notorious for back and neck injuries because of the awkward posture and instability of the platform that we work on. We all work on injury prevention through

the use of core stability muscles. As a helmsman it is my brain that is most worked and long days of testing can "fry your mind", concentrating on the performance numbers, sail trim and waves for long periods.  
**What are the highs and lows of training?**

I like our 45-minute "commute" out to sea: you don't see dolphins and penguins from the number 14 bus. The lows are the monotony; it often feels like *Groundhog Day*.  
**Are you on a special diet?** I am on a low-fat diet – fruit and veg, no snacks. My weight has dropped from 77kg to 70kg. But

when not in training, I'll binge on chocolate.

**How do you relax?**

You can't beat a glass of fine red wine or a cool beer for switching off.

**You suffered some defeats in the last round. What will it take to be successful at the next level?**

Many variables affect your result: your start, tactics and boat handling

are within your control, but some others, such as the weather and boat speed, are not always. To win you need a fast boat, good sails, the best crew, good strategy, perfect preparation, confidence and probably a little luck. ●

*The quarter-finals of the Louis Vuitton challenge begin on Tuesday*

**5**  
**MINUTE FIX**

**If your ab crunches feel easy, put books on your chest to increase the difficulty**