

VIEW

burning rubber

For the fashion-conscious, buying a new pair of running shoes can be an ordeal. Marina Rust reluctantly trades in her Tretorns.

m

y back

hurts. Dr. Evan Berk, Beverly Hills chiropractor, is nodding sternly.

"You say you recently started a running program?"

I try to nod but—immobilized—can't.

"What are you wearing to run?"

"T-shirt, shorts. Sweats if it's cold."

"I mean on your feet."

"Tretorns."

There is a stony silence.

After a few ear-shattering cracks, I'm in the car, on my way to the Valley. "Phidippides," my orders read. "Speak to Craig."

The store is famous, I'm told. All the serious runners go there. People fly in from other states to visit. The salespeople make you run around the block before letting you buy anything.

I find myself at a low-roofed Encino strip mall, parking in front of Yum Yum Yogurt. The store is small, not what I expect. Inside, it's floor-to-ceiling boxes, a variety of brands. A lean, rangy man in nylon shorts—indeed, Craig—asks me what sort of runner I am.

Um. Beginner.

"What have you been running in?"

Tretorns.

"Tennis shoes?" Craig doesn't laugh. Instead, he describes the lateral stress of running, versus the to-and-fro of tennis. "The fifth metatarsal tends to roll to the outside, so cross-trainers and tennis players need lateral support, whereas runners require in-line support."

Since high school I've worn white canvas Tretorns. On the display rack I see a shoe—Day-Glo orange and purple. I give it a fishy look.

"Asics," says Craig. "Good shoe. Do you pronate?"

Excuse me?

"What size are you?" He pulls a box from the stacks. "Let me watch you run in these." The shoes are black, white, and blue, Asics GEL-MC (Motion Control) 125.

I want plain white.

Craig ignores this, instead explaining ankle motion. "Most runners overpronate, tipping inward. They need ankle support."

What can overpronation cause?

"Shin splints, knee problems," says another salesman, poking in from behind the display.

OK. Now I'm wondering—why run?

Craig quotes a study that claims that cardiovascular exercise



slows the aging process all of four seconds per mile. The new salesguy, W.K., speaks of "runner's high"—a blast of endorphins, stronger than morphine. "My arm hair stands on end, I feel great, then—bang—the walls collapse."

It seems a twelve-step program is needed, not shoes.

How long should a pair of running shoes last?

"Four hundred to 600 miles."

Sounds like tires. Can they get a flat?

"Sure, if punctured."

What's your best-seller?

"Etonic Stable Air Pro 3."

Are they really filled with air?

W.K. nods. "Ambient air, like the air we breathe, only cleaner."

This "air" thing—did it start with Nike?

"Actually, Nikes are filled with gas. But 'Nike Gas' doesn't market as well as 'Nike Air.'"

What about Reeboks?

Craig says they're not sufficiently supportive for most people. "Reeboks are marketing oriented, not performance oriented."

W.K. is less kind. "If you have a spare \$100, buy their stock, not their shoes."

I try the Etonics. Comfortable but hideous—muddy turquoise and navy.

Do they come in plain white?

"None of them do."

Not one?

"OK, one." Craig brings out the Saucony Jazz 5000. Indeed, it's chalk white, though JAZZ is written in obnoxiously bold black letters across the tongue.

Any full-length mirrors in this store?

"Yes, but you have to ask more than once."

I look like a Budweiser Clydesdale.

Outside, it's a sunny California afternoon. I'm wearing the Etonics. Craig stands and watches me run the length of the sidewalk.

Do I run like a girl? I call, trotting back.

"You're fully controlled," says Craig.

Now can I try the white ones?

Craig nods.

In the white Sauconys, I pronate.

Back inside I settle on the blue Etonics. As I leave, Craig calls out, "See you in 400 to 600 miles!"

Sure. Or until I get a flat. □