



By Pete Peterson • Photos by Jesse Ziegler

BOOT SHOOTOUT

Booted

Up

Dirt Rider gathered up all the high-end boots available on the market to test them back to back and come out with our Boot Shootout Podium. We tested 11 brands and 15 styles of boots in two popular sizes and employed nine testers to rack up 250 hours and get a good overall impression of how each pair performed. The boots were judged on comfort, protection, bike feel, durability, break-in and fit. Price was not taken into consideration since we allowed each manufacturer to send in what it considered to be high-end. Keep in mind, the most expensive boot tested here still costs less than the cheapest cast.

Preferences varied from tester to tester, but at the end of the day, the discrepancies were minor and the top three boots became clear. There's no question the various brands fit

differently, and everyone's feet are unique. Fit is a key factor to keeping good feel with your bike, and having uncomfortable feet is one of the most unpleasant feelings while riding. It's a good idea to try on your personal pick before you buy.

Tested: 661 Hurricane, Alpinestars Tech 10, Alpinestars Tech 8, Alpinestars Tech 6, Answer Mode, AXO RC6, Berik RC OVS-Pro, Fly Viper, Gaerne SG:10, O'Neal Hardwear, Oxtar TCX Pro, Sidi Charger, Sidi Crossfire SRS, Sidi Crossfire TA, Thor Quadrant

Missing: Fox's new F3 and Scott's all-new Genius were not available at the start of testing.

To get the uncensored (OK, we had to censor them a little) notes on all the boots, go to www.dirtrider.com.



BOOT SHOOTOUT

Winner Sidi Crossfire SRS

This boot was universally appreciated for its fit and protection. The toe area is compact yet not too tight for most, the rear cups the heel like no other, and the boot doesn't hang up anywhere on the bike. The sole is very stiff, which takes some getting used to for brake feel but is welcome on hard landings or when hitting trail junk, especially by seasoned riders with a lot of track and trail time under their belts. Hinged at the ankle, it provides well-engineered support and movement and requires zero break-in. And as an added bonus, the soles are replaceable with a screwdriver.

Price: \$400-\$425

Contact: www.motonation.com;
877/789-4940



First Runner-up Alpinestars Tech 8

The Tech 8 has been around for a long time but has continually gone through upgrades. This A-Star is a nonhinged leather and plastic boot that employs a soft bootie to give it a comfortable fit. The boot has much more of a traditional feel and look compared with the winning Crossfire, leading it to earn a lot of votes from the traditional-boot lovers in our testing staff. Better materials have made this boot feel better, seal better and require almost no break-in. This is a risk-free boot—it does everything a boot is supposed to do and does it well. The soles have a replaceable high-wear area that can be changed out at home with a heat gun and boot glue.

Price: \$359.95

Contact: www.alpinestars.com;
310/891-0222



Second Runner-up Gaerne SG:10

This boot is hinged like the Sidi, but as with the Tech 8, it has a more traditional sole and toe area. The standout features of the SG:10 range from the great—such as the snug and supportive ankle—to the small—like the ease of getting into and out of it due to its wide opening and great buckles. The boot appears tough and kept very good support through many hours of testing.

Price: \$315.99

Contact: www.gaerne.com;
800/426-0213



BOOT BREAK-IN

We got the blisters so you don't have to

Most of these top-end boots required little or no break-in thanks to top-drawer engineering, design and materials. There are a few things you should do, however, to ensure they break in properly. Most of these tips apply to boot care in general:

Adjust to Fit

Take the time to adjust the straps properly before you ride. Make sure nothing is tight that might cause the boot to flex in the wrong place, and look over the boots to ensure every underflap is under and every overflap is over. Walk around a bit to make sure everything is moving properly and the fit is comfortable. There's a lot of engineering in today's boots; don't undermine what you paid for by running the boot incorrectly.

Paper Training

Moisture is the enemy of your boot. It will cause mold and will break down your boot's leather, lining and even threads. Bill Berroth, who is a Sidi importer, suggests that after washing with soapy water and a stiff brush, you make sure your boots dry evenly inside and out so the leather doesn't become stiff on the outside. Don't leave them in the sun or throw them into a cold garage. Let them dry at room temperature and stuff crumpled newspaper into them. Newspaper is excellent at absorbing moisture. In extreme cases, change out the newspaper a few times until the boot is fully dry. Don't wash your boot? You sweat in that thing. Newspapers are full of bad news—stuff 'em in your boot.

Lay Low

The weight of a boot's upper can affect the ankle portion of the boot. Your boot should only be upright when you're wearing it. Think of it like a dog—let 'em nap by laying them on their sides until needed and then they'll always be ready to go.

New Material, New School

Some old-school riders still believe in soaking a new boot in the bathtub, slathering it with mink oil or heating it up in the oven to speed break-in. These techniques will only shorten the boot's lifespan and do nothing to speed break-in—unless you wear them as you run from the kitchen fire.