

The price isn't the only thing that hurts: Salomon's new XA pro 3D V8 Wide

By Steve Willems

Hikers tend to sit in one of two religious camps: those who believe in sturdy boots, and those who love nimble shoes. Each side is convinced theirs is the only truth and often get stubborn about changing. Boots are sturdier and more waterproof, but shoes are lighter and dry faster. The truth is that no footwear does it all, so what happens when a battle-hardened boot purist ditches the leather and goes behind enemy lines to see if trail runners are better for beaches? Steve tests a pair of Salomon's new XA Pro 3D V8 Wide by walking 120 kilometres along the coast from Ballina to Coolangatta.



Salomon's XA pro 3D V8 Wide with the 'Quicklace' lacing system, encrusted with dried sea salt.

Hobbling along the footpath of a scorchingly hot industrial hellscape there were ten more kilometres to go before arriving on the sands of Coolangatta. Ten long, agonizing kilometres on blistered feet that were screaming in pain with every step. I'd switched from using my normal, heavy boots to a light new pair of running shoes and after 110 kilometres wondered if I'd made a mistake.

Normally I wear a trusty pair of Scarpa Terra GTX leather boots. They're great on rough terrain, never give me blisters, and are waterproof. But I've been doing a lot more beach walking and boots get hot. Hot feet are sweaty feet that get slimy and uncomfortable. It was time to try something cool and well-ventilated, like a running shoe.



On the beach paired with Salomon's ankle gaiters.

Salomon have a reputation for making the best trail runners on the market, and the price reflects that. But their famously narrow design never fit wider feet like mine. Now Salomon have released a 'wide' version of their XA Pro 3D V8 running shoe which fit me perfectly. Are they really as good as people say? I convinced myself to shell out the insane \$239.99 and give them a thorough test by walking the coast from Ballina to Coolangatta beach.

The first day couldn't have gone better. They were soft and comfortable straight out of the box, and my 15km stroll was like drifting over a cloud of reassurance it was money well spent. Ventilation through the front mesh kept my feet cool and somehow smelling better coming out than they did going in. It was a pleasant change from the usual toxic war-crime released every time I pulled a sweaty foot from a stuffy leather boot. But alas, pride comes before the fall.

The second day was much longer and I felt it. After twenty kilometres of soft beaches and hard roads my feet began to hurt. Hot spots developed under each heel; the first sign of blisters and that sinking despair knowing that despite the pain you have to keep going. Yes, I could have taped my feet. But it was too late, and with the right shoe I shouldn't need to.



The first blisters forming on day 2.

It didn't help that each shoe was filling with sand forming lumps under my toes. I was using Salomon's ankle gaiters, designed for their running

shoes to stop rocks and debris getting in. They worked great, but sand still got in through the front mesh and I had to keep stopping to empty them out. But this was a minor problem.

The blisters grew worse and the walk into Byron Bay was excruciating. I was glad to kick off the shoes and go nowhere for the night, but I wasn't even half way and every remaining step would be painful.



There was significant sand buildup

The right shoe can make or break any adventure. If you don't look after your feet, you won't get far or have a miserable time. Some people swear by their boots while others declare running shoes are the only way to go. The truth is there is no right or wrong. Everyone is different. And so is every shoe. Some people may not get blisters in these, but I did.

Despite the misery and hardship, I don't hate the Salomon XA Pro 3D V8 Wide. In fact, quite the opposite. With a brilliant lacing system, comfortable fit, and great ventilation, they've become my day-to-day pair for the summer. And I'm very happy with that. They're too light and flimsy for long-distance walking, but for anything under 20km on a warm day they're simply the best running shoe I've ever worn.

Verdict: 7/10 - While it's not sturdy enough for more serious adventures, they're super-comfortable, light-weight and well-ventilated, perfectly suited for shorter walks in the heat or where you don't mind getting your feet wet.

Support: Average

Durability: Excellent

Waterproofing: None

Comfort: Wow!

Price: Ow!

Blisters: 5

The Salomon XA pro 3D V8 Wide is an update of the XA Pro 3D with improved wet-surface grip, wider fit, and a sturdier chassis. It retails for \$239.99 in selected outlets and online.