


Review – Vibram FiveFingers New Performa

Overall impression

Vibram FiveFingers' new fall 2009 collection includes three new designs; we are pleased to review the Performa. I am thoroughly impressed with this new addition and find it an all around perfect indoor shoe. My feet and toes literally get the urge to dance while wearing them. Vibram FiveFingers has outdone itself with the Performas as they are extremely comfortable, are lighter weight than all their other shoes, and have extraordinary flexibility and comfort.



Living  Barefoot
Vibram FiveFingers Performa

Comfort

These shoes are so comfortable, they feel like a second skin. The kangaroo leather is luxuriously soft against my toes and the tops and soles of my feet. While walking in the Performas, my soles do not feel any stitching.

The only place where I feel them on my feet is on top of my foot along the first metatarsal bone where the elastic is attached to the vamp. It is not an uncomfortable feeling, just an awareness of the material. The elastic, with the convenient pull-tab, provides for an individualized fit that, once adjusted, can be secured to the heel of the shoe with Velcro, a new addition to the FiveFingers lineup.

I am thoroughly pleased with the freedom of movement my feet and toes have in the Performas. I can bend my toes up and down and spread them out as wide as when completely barefoot. There is significantly more flexibility in the Performas compared to the Classics. My feet can bend in any direction, unencumbered by the material of the shoe.



Weight

Each size 38 Performa shoe weighs 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ounces (50 grams). They feel practically weightless while on my feet.

Flex / Sole

The sole is made up of seven textured foot pods, one on the forefoot, the hindfoot, and one on each toe. Between the fore- and hindfoot pods, there is simply one layer of leather. Between the forefoot and toe pods, there is a double layer of leather, this does not obstruct the natural movement of the toes in any way and neither does the single layer along the longitudinal arches of the foot. Your foot is as flexible in these shoes as they are without any shoes on at all.

The foot pods themselves are also quite flexible; perhaps more so in the dorsiflexion (bending up) direction as the plantar flexion (bending down) direction due to the taper of the pods, although this is not noticeable to me as my feet and toes don't move very far in the plantar flexion direction anyway.

Support / Insole

There is no insole in the Performa as the only material along the longitudinal arches of the feet is a single layer of leather, with a thickness of 1.0–1.2 mm. Unlike the other full-soled FiveFingers models, my arches rarely feel any contact with the single layer of kangaroo leather, probably due to a high instep, but when they do, it feels pleurably soft.

Barefoot Feel

I believe that the barefoot feel of the Performas is currently unsurpassed in the minimalist footwear industry. It conforms so well to the natural shape of your foot that it is barely perceptible. Walking and running is absolutely the same when wearing the Performas as when barefoot in terms of gait. The foot pods provide a practically unnoticeable amount of cushioning. In fact, after switching to the Classics to compare, the Classics felt almost cushy under my feet while walking.

Breathability

There are small vent holes interspersed along all the single layers of leather, which cover approximately 75% of the tops and sides of the shoes. These holes provide a constant and comfortable air flow and thus the shoes have superb breathability. Even while running, my feet did not feel hot or overly sweaty.

Packer Leather, the makers of the K-100 kangaroo leather used in the Performa, states that the kangaroo leather itself has 'high water vapour permeability' providing added inherent breathability to the product.



Water Resistance

The K-100 Packer Leather 'has been engineered with a permanent water repellence technology based upon hi-tech polymers'. This allows for increased perspiration resistance compared to other leather products and prevents sweat damage, prolonging the life of the shoe. Packer leather notes on their website (www.packerleather.com) that sweat damage is what

typically makes leather hard, cracky, and darker in colour. Therefore, the Performas should have an increased lifetime as a result of these technologies.

Microbe Protection

The information provided with the shoe notes that the Performas are protected against microbe growth from two independent systems: an inorganic chemical microbe protection within the leather from Packer Leather called Microblok, and a physical microbe protection barrier by Aegis Microbe Shield. With these two systems, one can hope that the familiar smell associated with long wear of some FiveFingers products will be significantly reduced.

Quality of Materials / Manufacturing

Packer leather also mentions on their website the inherent strength of kangaroo leather itself. They claim that kangaroo leather is 'the strongest leather fibre structure readily available' because of the inherent properties of the kangaroo hide, the angle of the weave, and the natural low fat content of the skin. Assuming all these claims are true, Vibram chose a superior leather product to make their Performa shoes.

There are numerous seams on the Performa shoe, holding the leather pieces together



in the correct shape.

These seams are constructed in such a way that none of them are noticeably felt by the foot, they practically feel seamless while wearing.

Sizing

The fit of the Performas is in line with the Classic and Sprint models, which makes picking a size very simple if you already own one of these two models. If you don't, Vibram provides a size conversion chart on their website that only requires the longest length measurement of your feet. The chart proved accurate in sizing for the length of my feet.

In addition, as there is no rubber wrapping around the ends of the toes, they are simply wrapped in leather, which should make sizing easier and/or more forgiving in this model than previous full-sole models.

Price

The Performas are listed at \$110 USD on the Vibram FiveFingers website. Considering the luxurious comfort of these shoes, and the numerous leather innovations that went into their design, I think they are reasonably priced.

Style

In my opinion, the Performas are the most elegantly styled shoe in the FiveFingers lineup. They have the look and feel of expensive leather gloves for your feet.

They are currently available in three colours: a deep purple, all black, and a dark pink called coral. All three have black foot pods. Packer leather claims that because of their leather innovations, these colours should not darken over time, allowing the leather to maintain its original, deep hues for the lifetime of the shoe.

Break-in Period

There should be no break-in period for these shoes. The first time you put them on, the fit should be instantly comfortable. The only aspect of the shoe that required any getting used to was the initial feeling of the bottom edge of the forefoot pod during the first time I wore the Performas. This feeling disappeared within minutes of walking in them and was not felt again the next time that I wore them.

Shoe Care

These shoes are easily cared for. Vibram FiveFingers recommends that, when it comes time to wash these shoes, they be machine washed and air dried away from sun and heat sources.

Warmth

When I read the Living Barefoot review of the men's counterpart to the Performa, the Moc, I was initially sceptical about the warmth of these shoes. Upon wearing them in my cold house with my naturally cold feet, I was thoroughly convinced. I was pleasantly surprised by how warm these shoes are by themselves, without any socks. There was a noticeable temperature difference between the tops of my feet and those parts covered by the leather. Once my feet warmed the leather, my feet maintained a comfortable temperature whether I was active or relaxing. I am undoubtedly impressed with the warmth of these shoes.

Uses

These shoes are for indoor use only. Although I realize that barefoot is best, when barefoot is not appropriate or allowed, these shoes are my first recommendation for an indoor shoe. These shoes would be ideal for any indoor activity where your feet's soles may need a little added protection or traction; for example on any kind of carpet where activities demand twisting or any kind of hard surface where sweaty bare feet may lose traction. Suggested activities from Vibram FiveFingers include yoga, Pilates, fitness training, martial arts, and dance.

Summary

The Performa is another impressive product from Vibram FiveFingers. This model evolved from feedback regarding the FiveFingers lineup and suggestions by their customers to develop an even more minimalistic indoor model. I was pleasantly surprised by the comfort and warmth of these shoes and I greatly appreciate the leather innovations included in the construction of these shoes. They are well ventilated yet warm, water resistant, and have superior microbe protection. They have an unsurpassed barefoot feel and I intend to wear them as my indoor shoe of choice when barefoot may not be the best option.

To purchase these shoes, visit the Vibram FiveFingers website to locate a reseller near you.

Go out and treat your feet to a pair today.

<http://www.vibramfivefingers.com>

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