



Like running on clouds

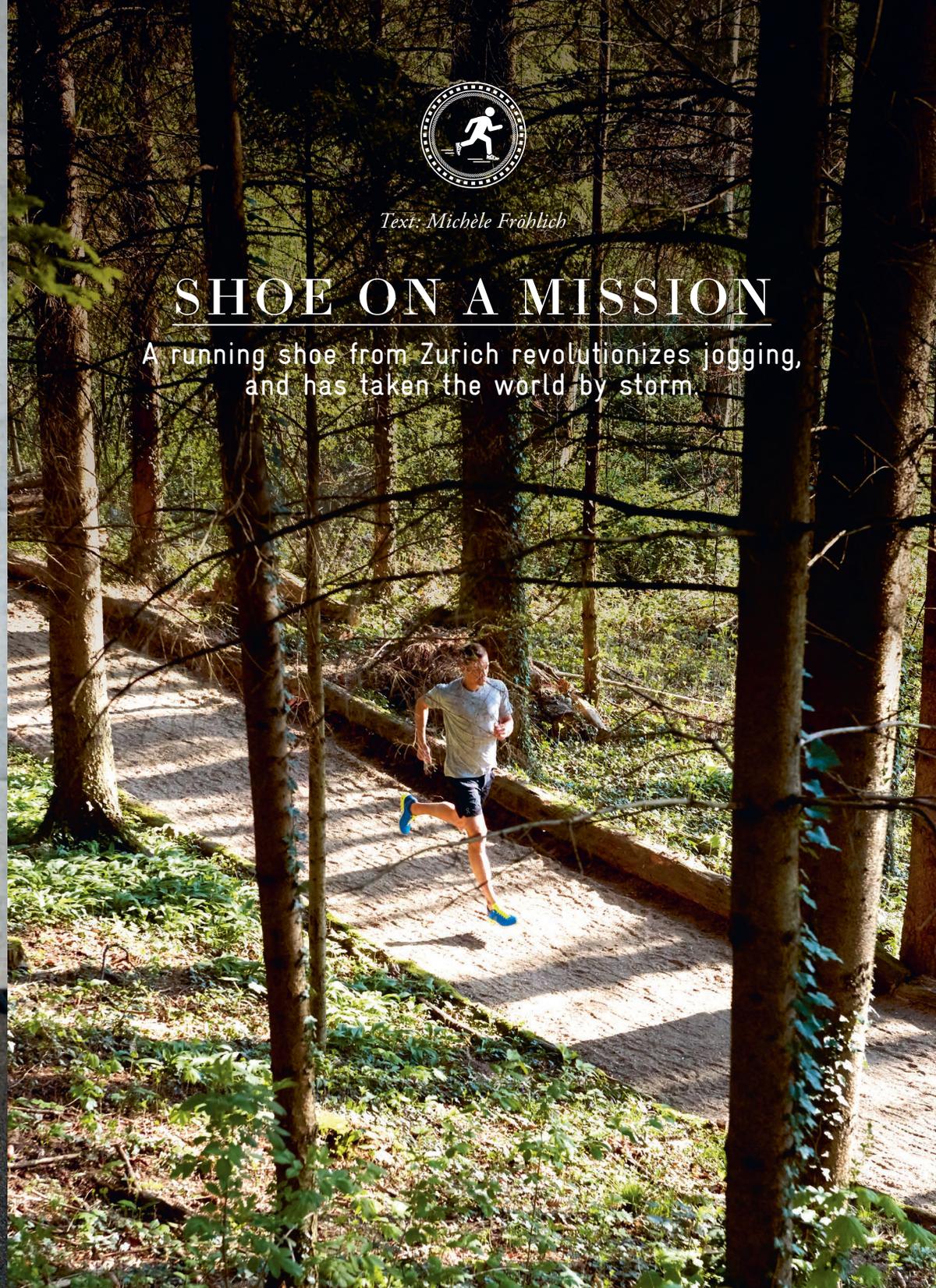
David Allemann, one of the founders of the shoe brand "On," is getting ready for the next distance run with the Cloudflow.



Text: Michèle Fröhlich

SHOE ON A MISSION

A running shoe from Zurich revolutionizes jogging, and has taken the world by storm.



As the light falls in through the crack in the cupboard door, and two hands grab me, I'm ready for action. My name is Flow, Cloudflow. Sounds almost as cool as "James Bond," right? Self-appointed secret agent, I don't corner the bad guys, but instead, safeguard human feet, and give my boss, David, a good time running. So I wait impatiently for the time he'll pull me out for our next mission.

David's full name is David Allemann, and he's one of the three founders of the Swiss running shoe manufacturer, "On." He and his friends – Olivier Bernhard and Caspar Coppetti – founded the company back in 2010. The three had a good nose for trends, an innovative technology idea up their sleeve, and enough courage to try and enter what looked like a saturated market. And sure enough, their product spurred enough interest for even their prototype running shoe to take an ISPO Brandnew Award for innovation – one of the most prestigious awards in the trade. Today, On shoes are sold in more than 4,000 sports stores in more than 50 countries, and in addition to Zurich, the company has offices in Portland (Oregon, U.S.A), Yokohama (Japan), and Melbourne (Australia).

Mission 1: Cushion and Protect the Joints

We've hardly left our office on the Pfingstweidstrasse when I hear the first murmurs of the Limmat River. On the short asphalt trek down to the water, I cushion every single step (that's part of my brand promise, after all!), keen to give David the impression that he's running on clouds. That's why my family and I are world champions, in fact. Okay, I realize self-adulation isn't very nice, but every so often, it's really okay to pat yourself on the shoulder. Some rogue competitors might say that we only look good, but when first-rate runners such as Tegla Loroupe, Nicola Spirig, or Geoffrey Gikuni Ndungu win medals with us, it's clear that their talk is just a lot of hot air.

The shoes do have air in them, and it's not hot air. The sole, namely, consists of building-block-like layered segments that have been joined together. There's the customary collapsible empty space when the runner lands, giving the feeling of landing on something very soft, even if the soles can push away hard from the running surface. That resist feature not only protects the joints, but makes for a shoe that's lighter than the competitors'. The On idea was born many years before the founding of the firm itself; an engineer was playing around with these ideas at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH). Co-founder Olivier Bernhard joined him shortly thereafter. Former top-runner and three-time Duathlon world champion, Bernhard had to give up sports because of a painful Achilles tendon. But the condition spurred his search for something that could ward off such discomfort. Many prototypes later, the first On shoe, the "Cloudsurfer," was born. Since then, ten more models have joined the family.

Mission 2: Reach the Top

The current mission is called "Käferberg" and is above the town of Wipkingen. The view from up there is inspiring, and David huffs like an old locomotive to reach

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1 Reach for the stars

Nature of the ground: Steep sections with different surfaces.

Recommended shoe: Cloudventure

Advantage: The Grip-Rubber profile performs in the most demanding conditions.

Special quality of the trail: View of the alps if it's not too cloudy.

Event: March 11, 2018, 9 km, 9.30 am at bus stop "Rautihalde."



2 Jungle run

Nature of the ground: Leads partly through the forest, gravel path.

Recommended shoe: Cloudflow

Advantage: Soft landings and explosive take-offs for high speed.

Special quality of the trail: Race tigers as you run along Zoo Zurich.

Event: March 25, 2018, 8.5 km, 9.30 am at bus stop "Waidspital."



3 Lake run

Nature of the ground: Even path along the lake, hard underground.

Recommended shoe: Cloud X

Advantage: You can easily mix your workouts.

Special quality of the trail: For an extra workout: 10 (bench) push ups at every bench you pass.

Event: May 6, 2018, 6.5 km, 9.30 am at tram station "Balgrist."



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the top. Near the allotment gardens, we head into the woods, the gravel crunching beneath my soles. And while David breaks into a sweat after the climb, I'm cool as a cucumber thanks to my adaptable mesh blends. We sprint up to the Fuchs pass and over the meadow near the scout cabin, which looks like a little island floating in the middle of the woods.

To get up there with the running shoe giants – Asics, Nike, and Adidas – is the company's goal. It hasn't been reached yet, but is in no way improbable: the company has already passed an impressive milestone: in Zurich track events, no fewer than 30% of the contestants wear On shoes. In Japan, On is already among the six most popular sports shoe brands, an achievement which would seem just about as unlikely as a certain Japanese watch reaching the top of the watch sales lists in Switzerland!

Mission 3: Innovate for the Future

The great view didn't last long. David needs to get back to work right away. A cold chill runs down my heel. If David keeps working so hard, a new generation of my namesake will be starting out on missions soon. Don't get me wrong: I have a lot of faith in revolutions; without them, I wouldn't be here. But it's sad despite that.

Cloudflow was the ninth member of the On family. Just a short time ago, his big brother Cloud was revamped, and the new Cloud-X was launched. A large team is already working on the shoes for 2020. Comparing the "now generation" to that of seven years ago, it's clear that the shoes' soles and uppers have been perfected further. Last year, the three founders also launched a light and airy sports clothing line.

My earlier fears have abated somewhat: David won't be replacing me as long as I haven't covered more than 750 kilometers, and with the short runs he does, that'll take some time. Further, what good would a secret agent be if he or she didn't have a Plan B? Long after those sport missions, with my smart design, I'm happy just to be seen on city trips. Of course, it would be laughable if I couldn't walk over pavement the same way I do over clouds!

RUNNING IN THE CITY

ON SHOES

Buy your On running shoes in one of the sales outlets, for example at Transa on Europaallee, or at Jelmoli and Och Sport on Bahnhofstrasse in Zurich.
» on-running.com

VITAPARCOURS

Swiss fitness enthusiasts keep in shape with so-called "Vitaparcours" – fitness tracks in the woods with workout stops for defined exercises.
» zurichvitaparcours.ch

SIGHT JOGGING

The fastest way to explore Rapperswil-Jona! Listen to stories from the city while running. The "Sight Jogging" tour is in German and not suited to beginners.
» rapperswil-zuerichsee.ch