

The Gravis IVsk8 Viking low review

When Arto Saari, a well-respected professional skateboarder, announced his switch from Etnies to the newly launched Gravis 'IVsk8' program, nobody really knew what to expect.

The first release from the range in the summer of 2008 was Arto's "Viking high" pro model, a tough shoe with an unusual, but quite refreshing, look. Rumour has it that Mr. Saari came to the first design meeting with a biker boot as his inspiration.



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Since then, Gravis continued to think outside the box and the IVsk8 collections have been characterised by styles not usual associated with skate shoes.

The approach can be seen in models such as the Filter and the recently released Dylan low and mid. Despite the initial strange appearance, Gravis is taking the IVsk8 program in new directions, which should be commended. This review is about the Viking low, the low-top, and often overlooked, brother of Arto Saari's first Gravis pro model.

If you decide that you would like to give the Viking low a try, as ever, make sure that you pick the right size. The sizing of this model is quite easy. I wear US 9.5 in Nike SB and US 9 in Adidas and Lakai, and a US 9.5 Viking low fitted perfect. The shoe is of a medium width and most people should be able to wear them in their regular size without going half a size up or down.

Durability

A disadvantage of the construction of the Viking low is that the two main parts of the Nike Dunk-inspired toebox aren't glued together, just relying on stitching. As a result, the two layers start to come apart after just a few hours once the threads have ripped through. As a consequence of these loose layers, the toebox became more V-shaped with wear and the newly developed peak became the main point of attack. Abrasion by the griptape soon wore through this point and the tear spread fast. The lifespan of the shoe could be greatly lengthened if this problem can be solved in the future.

Another small weakness in the construction is that the plastic reinforcement piece of the toebox (as can be seen in the picture) is a bit too short and doesn't reach the additional layer of the first flap. Therefore, this gap between the flap and plastic reinforcement consists of just one layer of leather and soft inner material. However, unless this area of around 1.5cm is heavily used, it shouldn't affect the overall durability too much. The lace protection worked very well during the test. If you don't lace the flaps of the first and last holes, the laces will last for the whole lifespan of the shoe.



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From inside to outside: Inner material, plastic reinforcement, black woven material, leather.

The three holes between the flaps are also protected because they lie lower than the surrounding material. This means the lace protection has also the advantage of maintaining the classic look of the shoe, compared with a hidden lacing system that normally only works on really technical designs.



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In this case, the materials also add durability. The tested colourway features a thick premium leather upper. The material is also very flexible, which is not always the

case and reveals the high quality of it. On one hand, it withstands the abrasion of the griptape but, on the other, the surface becomes rougher with wear. This produces a look and flick that is not unlike suede, but more on that later.

The only part of the upper that is not leather is a woven shirt material in the heel. This is not durable and rips fast. Since the material is only featured around the ankle, where not much abrasion resistance is needed, it doesn't affect the performance and can be overlooked.

The inner material in the front of the shoe is very soft and comfortable, but it ripped through just from pressure from the toe movement within the shoe. A material that is a bit more durable would be better here. The tongue of the Viking low is made of thin leather and is just the right length. It lies deep inside the shoe and tongue straps assure that it stays close to the instep of the foot. These features protect it from touching the griptape and fraying out. Both the midsole and



Hole in the inner material, too short plastic reinforcement

the outsole hold up very well. The bottom sole, with its rhombus pattern, has a deeper profile than it seemed at first sight. It was durable enough to last over the whole life span of the shoe. However, at some of the edges of the outsole layer, which was glued on the midsole, the rubber wore down quickly, as can be seen in the pictures.

All in all, the Gravis Ivsk8 Viking low holds up quite well. The good craftsmanship and the premium leather ensure the durability of this model. As mentioned above, though, the shoes does have a weak spot at the front of the toe, since the toebox isn't glued and the stitching rips through with wear. The suede upper of other colorways could also reduce the durability a bit. The great lace protection and the solid side wall construction are the strengths of this model and should compensate for the weaknesses.

Breathability

The breathability of the Gravis Viking low is average compared with most models on the market. The model has vent holes on both sidepanels, the toebox and the tongue. Since they all don't go completely through the inner lining, the air exchange shouldn't be overestimated though. The tongue is very important for the breathability and moisture exchange. The stuffing material of it works like a pillow that keeps the warm air in the shoe if no options for exchange are integrated.



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The construction of the Viking low tongue allows some air exchange, but since the top material is perforated leather and not mesh, which is more breathable, the unwanted isolating ability of the foam within the tongue prevails.

Like almost all shoes on the market, the Viking low isn't constructed with the main goal of breathability. There is a lot of potential for improvements in this area. If you don't attach great importance to breathability, though, the Gravis Viking low is still a good choice.

Cushion

One of the strengths of the Viking low is the cushioning. The shoe has three different components that set it apart from shoes with a comparable construction. First is the "Cloud 9 PU-footbed" Gravis insole. It is ergonomically shaped and is almost twice as thick in the heel area than at the front. Also, compared with insoles of other brands, it's at least one and a half times thicker in the heel area, which makes a big difference. The second cushion component is the insole, which you can see when the removable insole is taken out. Comparable models of other brands have this sole as well, but the Viking low has an additional layer of blue foam in it.



The last cushion element is the black foam between the outsole and the sewed-in insole. Gravis calls this "Poron shock absorption", which is a trademark name of microcellular polyurethane (PU). If you have a closer look at the cross section, you can see the Poron bended over the honeycomb structure of the outsole in the heel area, which is an indicator how much pressure was absorbed but is also a sign that the material is fatigued.

All in all, the cushioning of the Viking low is great for a shoe of its kind. The combination of different layers of foam, with different thickness, worked great in practice. The shock absorption is especially noticeable when bailing tricks. It is also noteworthy that the forefoot is still thin enough to provide great boardfeel, but more about that later.

Shape

The medium shape of the Viking low should fit both narrow and wide feet. The shoe has a thin sidewall and heel construction, so it is less bulky than it might look at first sight, but it is still very supportive. The toebox could be described as broad but gets consistently slimmer towards the peak. It is neither round nor arrow-shaped, but has a noticeable peak. As always, the pictures provide most insight into the toebox shape.



Boardfeeling

The boardfeeling of the Viking low is very good for a shoe with a cupsole. In the front foot area, the sole is thin enough, despite the already mentioned foam layers, which leads to direct contact between foot and board. The more cushioned heel area doesn't affect the boardfeeling – direct contact with the board plays a secondary role in this area. As a general rule, you could say as long as the front half of the sole is very thin the boardfeeling is good.

Grip

The sole of the Gravis Viking low features a net-like pattern of small triangles with the right amount of depth to secure a long-lasting profile. The small lines that connect the triangles are very flexible and give the sole good grip. The adhesion can't compete with the best vulcanised models though, but it is still one of the best cupsoles on the market. Another interesting fact is that the sole doesn't have flex grooves except for one that divides the forefoot and heel area.



Nonetheless, the shoe adapts to the concave of the board quite well, so the missing grooves don't reduce the performance. The reason for that might be the thin forefoot construction compensating for the missing flex grooves.

At first sight, the upper material of thick premium leather doesn't look like it would provide a good flick. But after just half an hour, the material in the spots that had contact with griptape became rougher because of the abrasion and developed a suede-like look and flick. All in all, you can say that the premium leather can definitely compete with traditional suede when it comes to the flick, while providing more durability and stability.

Comfort

The Viking low has a moderately padded heel area. If you have a look at the cross section you can see that, except for a streak of foam at the top, there's no additional padding. This makes it a very slim shoe without any unnecessary bulk. An advantage of such a construction is the direct contact between shoe and foot, which is getting increasingly popular these days. But although there's not much padding, the shoe stays very comfortable and shows that thick padding isn't necessarily a sign of a good skate shoe.

The Gravis Viking low features an ergonomically shaped insole. Because of the additional material in the arch area, it is much more comfortable and, when landing, the insole provides better cushioning in this region. Without the wedge, there's a gap between your arch and the insole and the foot gets pressed flat. The difference in height between heel and forefoot also adds to the comfort. Straight out of the box, the



thick premium leather is a bit stiff, especially in the front. After a few sessions it gets smoother but keeps its shape and support over the whole lifespan of the shoe, unlike suede, which normally tends to stretch out and loses its support with wear. Although the structure of the inner material isn't very durable, it offers great comfort with its almost felt-like texture. The stitching inside the shoe is almost unnoticeable, even in the densely stitched flap on the toebox.



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An interesting detail is the shape of the upper part of the heel area. The two bumps on either side of the Achilles tendon make it both supportive and comfortable. The shoe has a deep cut under the ankle bone but it rises again towards the peak of the heel, and the cut-out between the two bumps allows you to stretch your foot to the front. All in all, every need is satisfied: deep cut for freedom of the foot while supporting the heel without friction on the Achilles tendon. Not many models are able to provide both these features.

Stability

The backbone of a supportive skate shoe is a strong and stable heel area that holds the foot in position and doesn't allow too much movement. The Gravis Viking low incorporates all these requirements. The big, thick support element, made out of C-shaped plastic piece, is the main reason for the great stability and support of this model. As you can see in the pictures, it is bigger than the support elements of all other shoes that have been tested so far.



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Clear support element marked red

A good way to test the stability of the heel of different models is to squeeze the sides together between your thumb and fingers. The more pressure you need, the better the stability.

Another factor that adds stability, especially to the sidewall construction, is the thick premium leather. Since it doesn't lose its original shape and strength, the foot is protected against sideways movement at all times. The suede versions of the Viking low could be a little bit worse in this area, but the whole panelling and construction of the model should still be able to offer great protection and support even if softer materials are used.

The previously mentioned shape of the heel area adds stability as well. The cut, which is quite similar to Arto Saari's first pro model for éS, wraps nicely around the Achilles tendon and is higher in that area than most other models, which works well with the lower cut around the ankle bone.

All in all, the stability and support of the Viking low is one of its biggest strengths. The shoe wraps the foot, locks it down in the heel area and feels very supportive and secure. The shoe can definitely be recommended for skating gaps or performing high-impact tricks.

Improvements

The Viking low has clear strengths but also some areas that could be improved.

First, the toebox comes apart too fast. The lost integrity reduces the shoe's durability. If the stitching between the layers was backed up by glue, the lifespan of the shoe could be greatly extended, even after the stitching has worn through.

The second suggestion concerns the breathability of the model. The developers included several perforated areas in the design, but unfortunately the holes don't go through all layers. If they did, this would alleviate the air flow. Also, a tongue made out of mesh in the area under the laces would help the hot air over the instep of the foot that develops while skating to leave the shoe.

One sentence summary

The Gravis Ivsk8 Viking low is a highly supportive and strong cupsole shoe, with average durability and good cushioning, boardfeeling and grip.

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