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COMPRESSION GUARDS

They're increasingly ubiquitous on the tri scene for both their performance and recovery benefits. But which brands compress to impress? **Nik Cook** slips on five...

1 SKINS A400

£31.00 www.skins.net

As one of the pioneers of compression clothing with a heritage of producing some outstanding compression tights, bib shorts and tri-suits, we expected great things of the Skins calf guards. Disappointingly, they just didn't deliver. Having measured our tester's calf to confirm his size as a medium, the guards still slipped on far too easily and there wasn't any real sense of compression. The stitching around the stirrup showed signs of fraying and, unless the fit is spot on, the lack of a top gripper means that slipping is a major concern. True to form, when out running they slipped down the calf a couple of inches to indicate that the guard wasn't performing as it should. We did feel there were some support benefits from the guards and they were very comfortable. But there just wasn't that rock solid compression that you really want.

A rare drop in standard from the compression pioneers

220 Triathlon

54%

1



2
2XU CALF GUARD W/ STIRRUP

£30.00 www.2xushop.co.uk

The 2XUs have plenty of high-end features for the cheapest guards on test. The stirrup removes the need for a tight band around the ankle, which can result in blood pooling in the foot. Stitching is neat and robust throughout and should ensure a good working life. The silicon gripper at the top does a great job of keeping the guard up and ensures there's no slipping. The medium size supplied matched our tester's calf measurement, but went on worryingly easily and the feeling was pleasantly supportive rather than genuine compression. Out running, the 2XUs didn't slip down at all but initial reservations about their compressive qualities were confirmed. They were comfortable, pleasant to wear and you could almost forget they were on. But they just weren't tight enough to deliver true compression benefits.

VERDICT
 Great price, excellent features but not enough compression

220 Triathlon **67 %**

3
COMPRESSPORT ULTRA SILICONE

£40.00 www.compressport.uk.com

Getting the Compressport guards on was a battle but, unless you're trying it in transition, this tends to be a good sign. The material felt durable and the cuffs and one-piece tube construction of the actual guard should mean no fraying or split seams. Neither the ankle or below-the-knee cuff were excessively tight, and the generous amount of unusually positioned silicon grippers did a really good job of holding the guard in place. The fit was spot on and gave a noticeable amount of compression without any discomfort. On the trails, everything felt perfectly held in place, and the guards delivered that sense of compression, support and security that really makes you feel a stronger and more confident runner. There was no slipping or riding up and, even after a tough hill workout, our tester's calves felt surprisingly fresh.

VERDICT
 Excellent compression, support, performance and price

220 Triathlon **92 %**

4
SUGOI PISTON 200

£37.00 www.sugoi.com

Made out of a similar Lycra material to both 2XU and Skins, the Sugoi calf guards again slipped on far too easily. The medium size supplied, which corresponded perfectly to our tester's calf measurement, gave little sense of compression or support. The quality of the stitching on the seams seemed good and the silicon gripper at the top of the guard kept them up well. Reflective detailing is a good idea on a running garment but, after just one use and wash, one piece had fallen off completely and several others were peeling away. When running, the big plus was the lack of slipping, but the degree of compression and support was probably the lowest on test. They did a good job of keeping our tester's lower legs warm during an unexpected summer hailstorm but £37 is a lot to pay for leg warmers.

VERDICT
 There's no point in compression garments that don't compress

220 Triathlon **51 %**

5
ZOOT ULTRA COMPRESS RX

£45.00 www.zootsports.com

Coming in as the most expensive guards on test is always a tough gig, but the Zoots shared a lot in terms of feel and design with the Compressport entry. They also replicated many of the plus points, including a really graduated and compressive fit, no excessive tightness at the cuffs and durability. Although they looked fairly short, once on the Zoots stretched and moulded around the entire lower leg perfectly. On a gruelling 10 x 600m track session, our tester's calves felt incredibly compressed, supported and stabilised. Even without any form of grippers, there was no slipping or riding up and they definitely had the added spring-in-your-step factor. Performance and fit-wise, it was level pegging between them and the Compressport but the Zoots were docked a few points for the additional £5 spend.

VERDICT
 Joint top performance but no need to spend the extra cash

220 Triathlon **89 %**