



Wear Test: asics Kayano 12



You'd have thought that it's unnecessary for a flyweight like me to be wearing a 12.6oz stability shoe like the Kayano. That was the same doubt I had too. I've always been wondering why some of my equally lightweight friends would be so loyal to the Kayanos. These loyalists have stuck to the series since the Kayano 9. Having said that, I'm no stranger to the stability category, with the Axiom 2 and Forster still in active duty. Since moving to the stability side, I've had no issues with the ITB when raising my weekly mileage.



I was looking for a replacement shoe for the 2120 (12 oz) which was already past its "middle age". I get replacement shoes once the current pair is past midlife so that I've time to break them in while rotating its use. So when a local sporting chain had the Kayano 12 (2006 model, awarded Best Update then by the RW magazine) on 50% discount, I decided to give it a try. To cut to the chase, I was very impressed with the feel and took the highest-end-shoe-I've-ever-worn home for RM299.

Now that I've logged over 500K in them, training for the KLIM and now the Sundown Marathon, I now know more about the shoe than before. Before going into the wear specifics, here are some factoids about the Kayano name. Named after its designer, Toshikazu Kayano who was inspired by a beetle (!), the Kayano line represents one of the best-selling running lines of all time. Even at a retail price of RM600 it isn't the most expensive model in asics' stable. That title belongs to the Kinsei 2 (retailing at close to a jaw dropping RM800). See left pix – No. 12 is inscribed on the outsole.

I see the Kayano as the top end option to the more reasonably priced but still expensive GT-2xxx series. The GT series has nearly all of the Kayano's bells and whistles but somehow tweaked differently. In the world of hi-fi, it's like comparing the common Marantz CD player versus the Ken Ishiwata tuned SE models. In the world of cars, there are more examples like the stock Lancer versus the Evo, stock Merc versus the Brabus, stock VW versus the Wald.



Let's do a comparison on what goes into both GT and Kayano series: Heel and Forefoot Gel, Duomax medial post, PHF, Solyte co-polymer, AHAR, Solyte 55 last (see picture on the right – the yellow layer), IGS, Trusstic are all common on both sides. But the Kayano has a DuoSole forefoot outsole compared to the GT's normal blown rubber. This DuoSole feature is quite amazing. They somehow stick 2 different layers of material to make the outsole - the more durable black rubber on top of the spongy orange one. And the Kayano's dual-layered ComforDry insole is plusher and made of different material. Finally there's the Biomorphic Fit of the Kayano's upper where the synthetics move and stretch with the shoe flexion in a way that the upper don't pinch and chafe your feet.



The Kayano rides lower to the ground than the GT yet it's more forgiving in terms of cushioning and support. Being lower also accords it a greater responsiveness.

My first few runs in them felt like wearing, well, akin to driving a Toyota Liteace van than a German marquee. Something seemed to be wrong. The shoe was hard and it certainly didn't feel as plush as it did in the store. I didn't feel like a "hero" that [it's designer wanted its wearers to feel like](#). Then I realized that I'm not a heavyweight. The Kayano best serves a medium to heavy runner by providing the best in class stability and cushioning. At my marathon training weight of 57.5Kg, I'm hardly heavy. Naturally it took me longer to break in new shoes.

The tipping point came at about the 80K mark, I started to feel the softening of the ride. The forefoot became more forgiving. The plushness of the heel cushioning became obvious. As the 2120 became increasingly worn out, my sessions in the Kayano increased and with it, my satisfaction. I eventually ditched the Supernova Cushion and Axiom to rotate exclusively between the 2120 and Kayano. The adidas and Brooks are now my backup pairs. For reviews on these shoes, read [my reports here](#).

My long runs were done mostly in the Kayano and where I had some metatarsal issues in the 2120 for my 30K runs, I encountered none in the Kayano. My runs are typically done on undulating, ITB-stressing territory but I've been so far spared of ITB distress. No blisters too since the forefoot is spacious and upper very breathable.

The degree of outsole wear and tear is very acceptable. I've not slipped running on synthetic surfaces, tarmac and bricked pavements, which the forefoot gripping particularly well.

So which pair is for you - the GT or Kayano? Having worn the GT and now the Kayano, I can certainly attest that I prefer the Kayano ride. From foot plant to toe off, it cushions the impact better. However, it would be an overkill to get the Kayano just for casual jogging, unless of course you need all the protective technologies. Prefer a firmer ride? Get the GT. Whichever your choice may be, buy them only on discounts. With the 14th iteration already in the market, I'm looking forward to continue my relationship with the Kayano (which features a much larger gel unit in the heel) during the next big sale.



Note: Since the launch of the K14, more user reviews have surfaced. The K13 is apparently firmer than the 12 while the 14 is softer than the 13. After several years, wearers are still lamenting and criticizing the departure of asics' SpEva midsole. The Solyte co-polymer, while lighter, are being blamed for the hard riding properties. This is certainly true as my Gel Trabuco VIII and Forster feels cushier.

I've since consigned the Supernova and Axiom to emergency duties only as I've found that my knees and archilles take a bashing when I wear either of these pairs.

I've acquired the ultra-plush 12oz [Vomero 2](#) (RW Best Update '07) to rotate with the Kayano. I expect the Kayano 12 to hit the 800K mark in a month's time.



Band Of Brothers

Before discount: RM599
After 50% discount: RM299
Weight: 12.6 oz (but feels lighter)
Lineage: Past Kayanos
Award: RW Best Update May 2006
Ride: 4.5/5
Ventilation: 4/5
Forefoot Cushioning: 4.5/5
Heel Cushioning: 4/5
Stability: 4.5/5
Durability: 4/5
Wet Traction: 4.5/5