5 of The Best Sports e-Commerce Sites

By Damian Koblintz

Sports retailers need to showcase their products just as well as fashion retailers, and make it easy for customers to shop. This guide takes a look at five of the best sports eCommerce stores.

The way that sports brands go about e-commerce mirrors the wider e-commerce landscape in microcosm. You have large brands and retailers with a lot of money to spend, you have smaller, challenger brands who are trying to carve a niche in the market and you have a group of brands for whom a website is less of a priority, a portal for retailers to get in touch and to begin the sales process.

In this guide, we're going to look at which brands are doing it well, and to draw out some of the highlights. It's always useful looking for inspiration cross-industry, so even if you are not working in sports itself, you should find something of use in here. This is mostly the mid-sized challenger brands who seem to be able to operate their website and content in a more agile way, but also cannot rely on the sheer weight of advertising and multi-channel distribution of say, an Adidas. It may be obvious, but if people arrive on your website and they are already determined to buy a product, there's much less to do in terms of selling and persuasion - you need to make the journey as simple and as pain-free as possible. So if the Adidas website looks fairly utilitarian, that's probably for good reason.

For brands and retailers, there are a number of challenges that you face when building your website. In both cases, it comes down to being able to balance brand identity with a customer journey that ends in a transaction. Aside from maybe ten of the biggest brands and retailers, these companies don't do a great deal in the way of mass media advertising, so people's view of these brands is largely formed by the interactions with them - with the website and with the products and services. Using brand assets in a sales context highlights the contradiction between the two processes - brand assets seek to draw the visitors attention and make them stop and absorb a message, whereas the slickest sales channels are frictionless buying experiences that connect people with products and then to a checkout. Amazon, of course, is at an extreme end of this.

These examples highlight some brands and retailers who seem to have got the balance right, as well as some of the features they use to create a great shopping experience.

Tracksmith (https://www.tracksmith.com/)

If this feels familiar, you're right - this New England run brand shares a co-founder with cycling brand Rapha, who used to be the gold standard for this sort of premium sportswear.
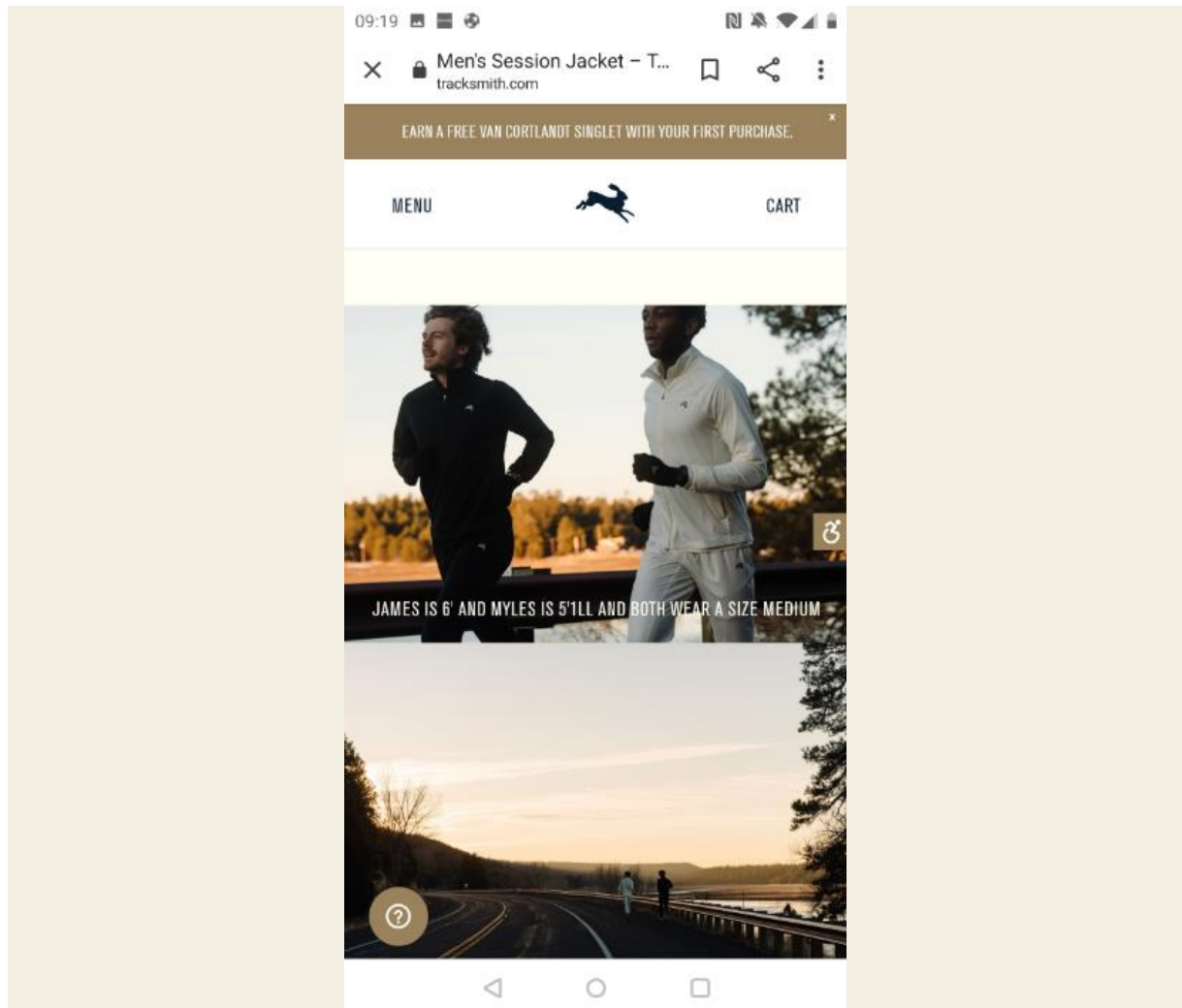
This is a great example of the slow sell - each part of the website is thematically consistent around an effort to capture the feeling and quality of running, rather than a collection of pricing and sales banners. In terms of range and product pages, there is particular focus paid to fitting and features - vital if you are charging at the top end of the market.

It's also worth highlighting their accessibility menu, launched by a small button on desktop:
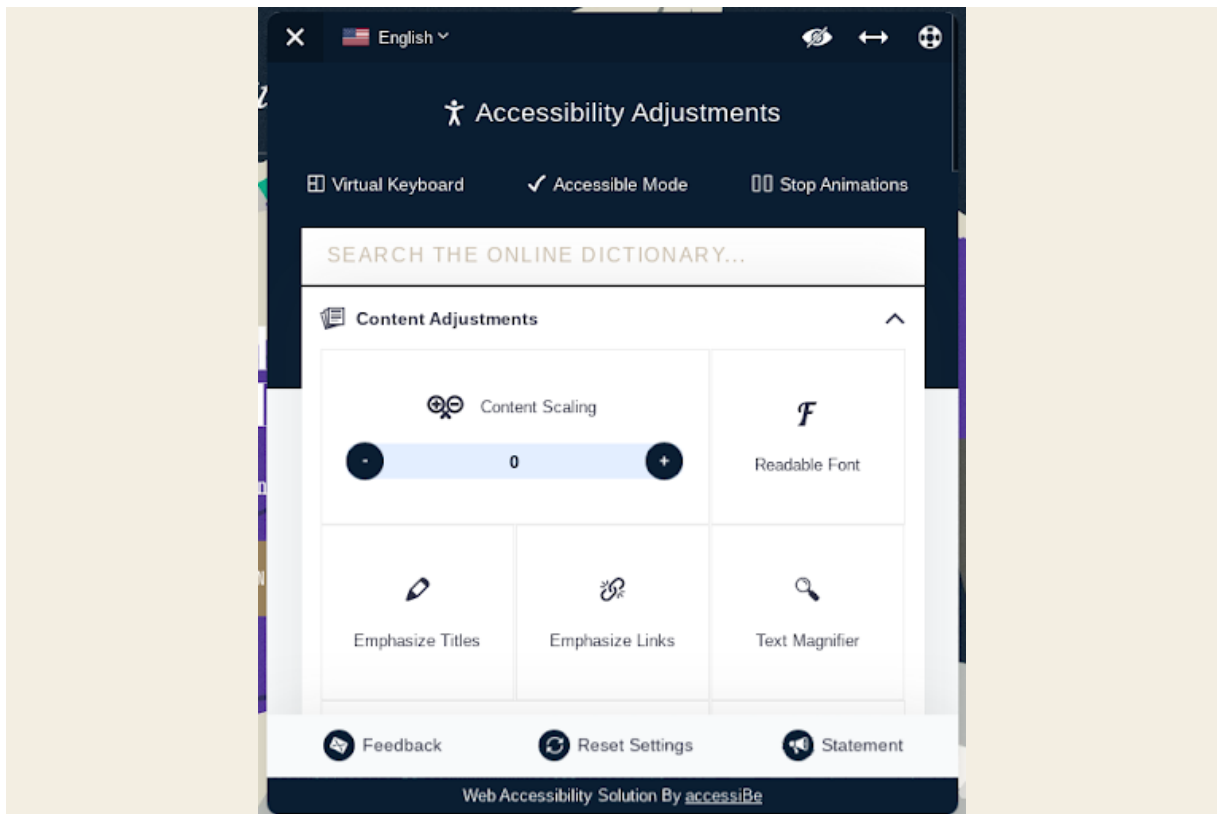
None of the other websites I looked at had anything approaching this, and while it may not affect the majority of visitors, their commitment to this detail is very consistent with their overall brand

What they do well

1. Integrate brand assets naturally in on-site purchase funnel.
2. Clear sizing and fit information
3. Each range launched with a campaign that is consistent on-site and in advertising, maximising investment in both .

Specialized (https://www.specialized.com/)

Specialized is one of the largest brands within the cycling industry, and as such its website serves a dual purpose - providing information and data on its bikes and funneling customers to its bricks and mortar retailer partners to try and buy, and a direct to consumer offering on parts, clothing and shoes.

At the moment, they are pushing their electric assist offering, which is relatively unusual in having high-end performance options as well as the more common utility versions, which obviously inherit tech and range association from their more expensive cousins.

This comes through quite obviously on the homepage - again, there is only one sales-specific message around free delivery.
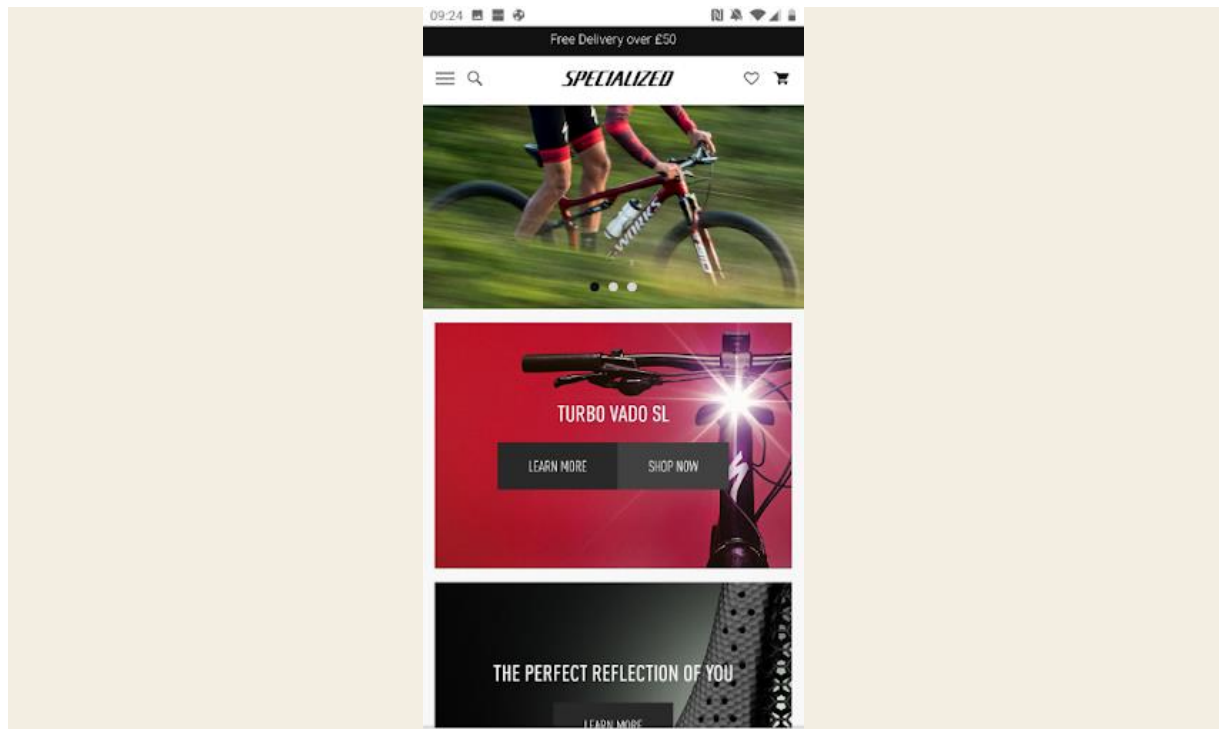
The stand out part of this site, though, is the product comparison execution - it's the clear call to action on product pages themselves:
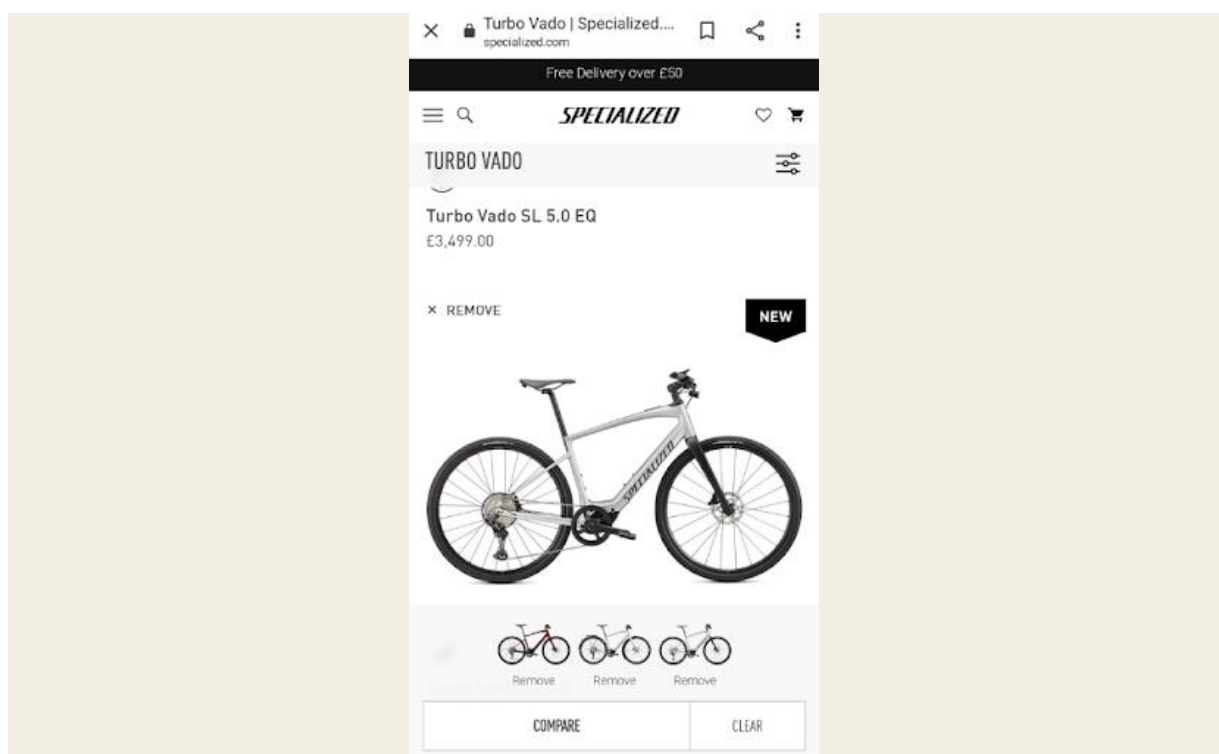
It has a really nice mobile rendering that allows scrolling left and right to bring in more products, and up and down for a really clear view of product details:
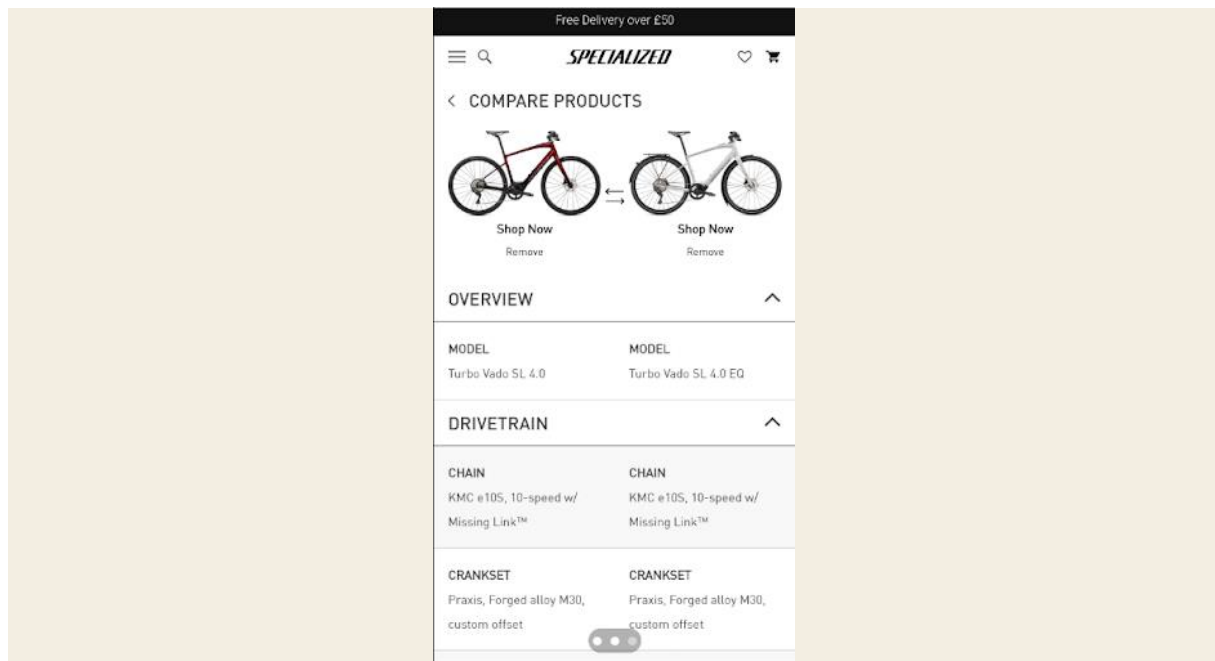

What they do well:

1. Clear messaging around a key product line (electric bikes)
2. Best in class product comparison functionality
3. Product data clearly presented in specific sections for better readability

Nike (https://www.nike.com/)

Of all the big brands and retailers, the Nike website is probably the best. A lot of these companies have had a web presence for a long time, and you can see how that legacy affects them in terms of having the most up to date showcasing of brand and products. You can see how this goes - platforms are improved and added to over time, leaving a huge amount of customised code, further limiting options and also making a radical overhaul and relaunch an expensive proposition and one that publicly traded and more risk-averse companies may choose to avoid.

Most of the Nike website is well presented, if not especially remarkably executed. But their product pages are worth a second view, especially the way in which they highlight product features:
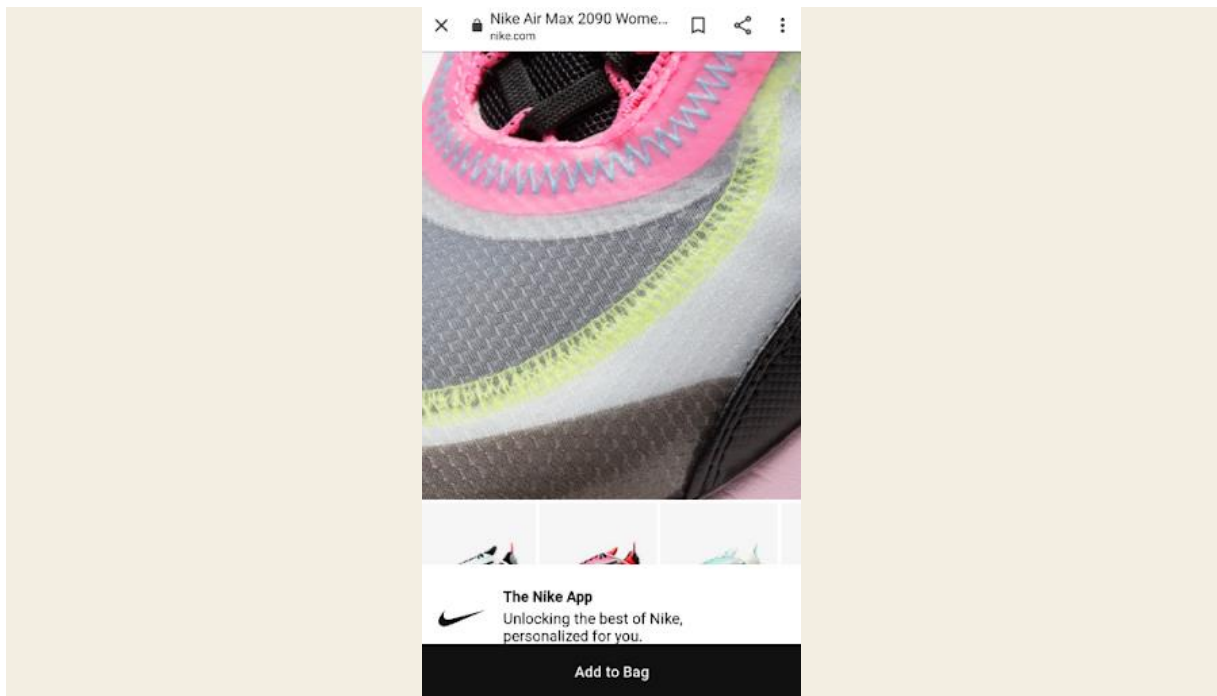
Nike has always been a visual brand, and this focus on the small detailing of products works really well online where you can't pick up and examine a pair of shoes. Almost everyone will have a view of the quality of Nike, so this type of image creates customer confidence in exactly what product version they are buying. As well as increasing conversion rate, this likely reduces return rate from customers surprised at aspects of products.
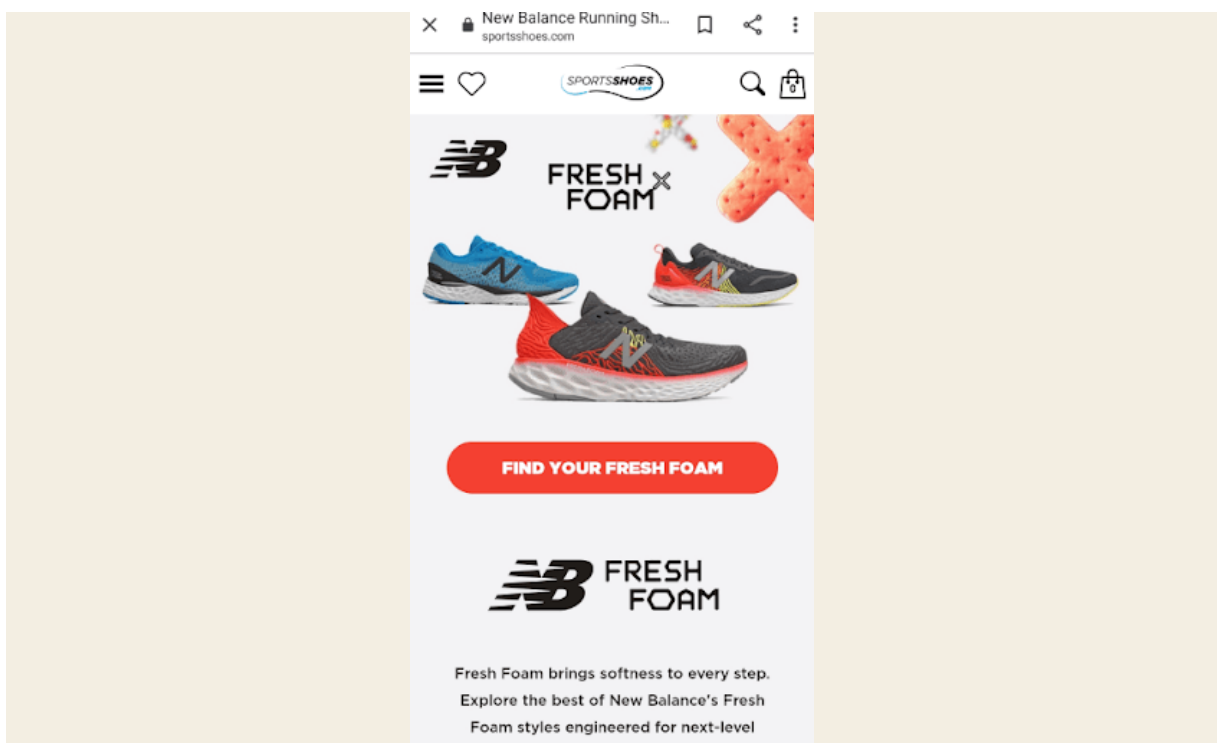
What they do well

1. Don't try to oversell brand messaging on the website - one core campaign and then straight into product showcasing. The website trades off the back of the huge advertising budget.
2. Great product pages that work well on mobile - there seems to have been a lot of testing done.

Sportsshoes.com (https://sportsshoes.com)

Sportsshoes.com feels like a relatively recent addition to the sports retailer market, but in fact, it was one of the first retailers to move online. Their growth over the last five years has been phenomenal and this is in part due to the quality of their website, which really doesn't feel like it is bogged down with technical debt and legacy code.
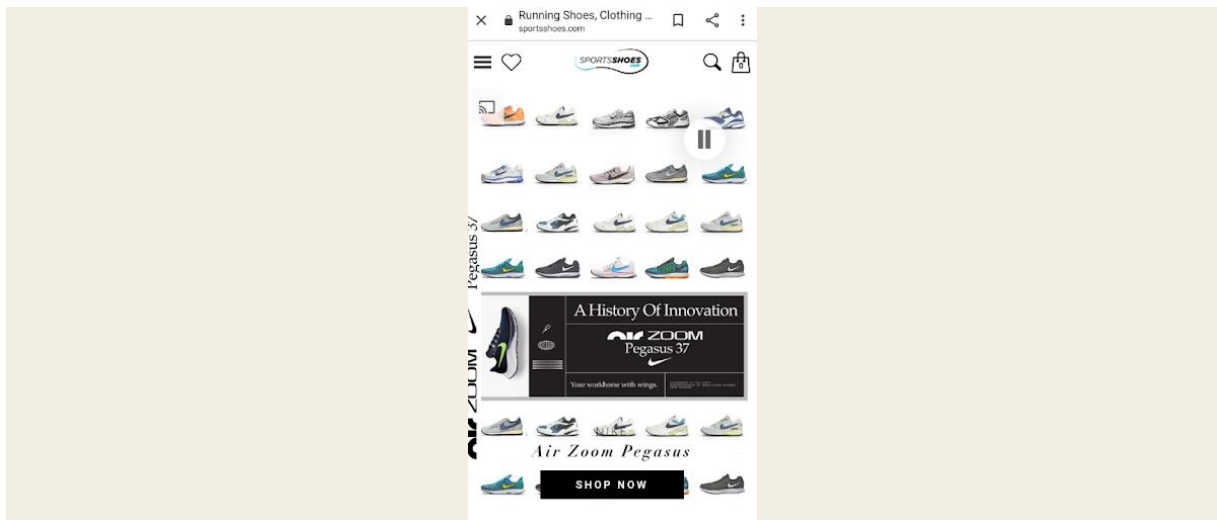
There's a lot to like - the range showcasing on landing pages feels natural and informative without creating customer friction, as do more campaign-specific pages, which seamlessly move from creating emotional desire to creating a route to buy the products without having to leave a page, an underrated factor in mobile user experience:
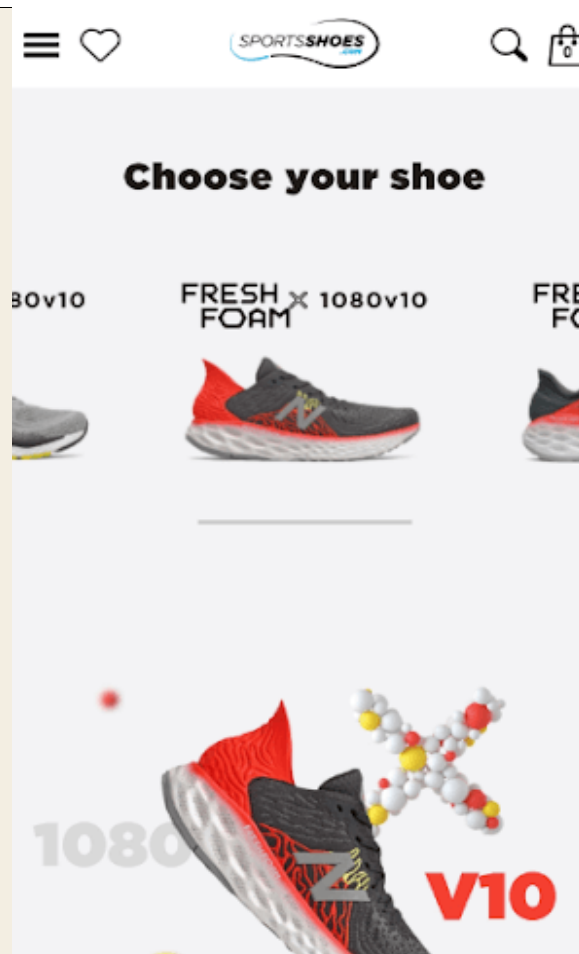
The product information part of their product pages is excellent as well, with the fit type an important addition for a site that specialises in sports shoes.
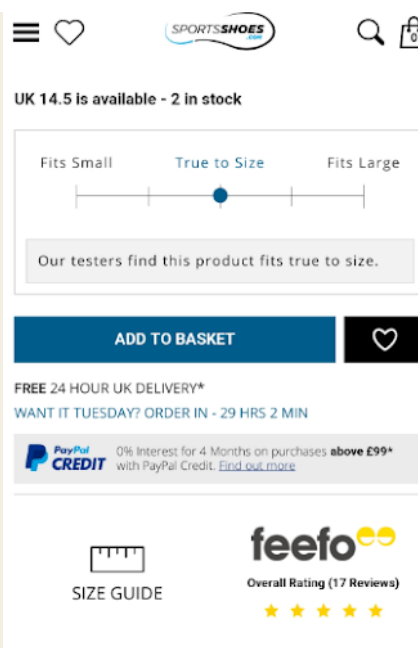
What they do well

1. Excellent integration of brand promotion and sales that showcases campaigns but doesn't give the website a disjointed look - they are clearly working well with their brand partners.
2. Well thought out product pages that give key information to customers - this seems to have been testing out thoroughly.

On Running (https://www.on-running.com/)

The Swiss running shoe brand has long been an example of how to combine branding and a direct to consumer offering successfully.
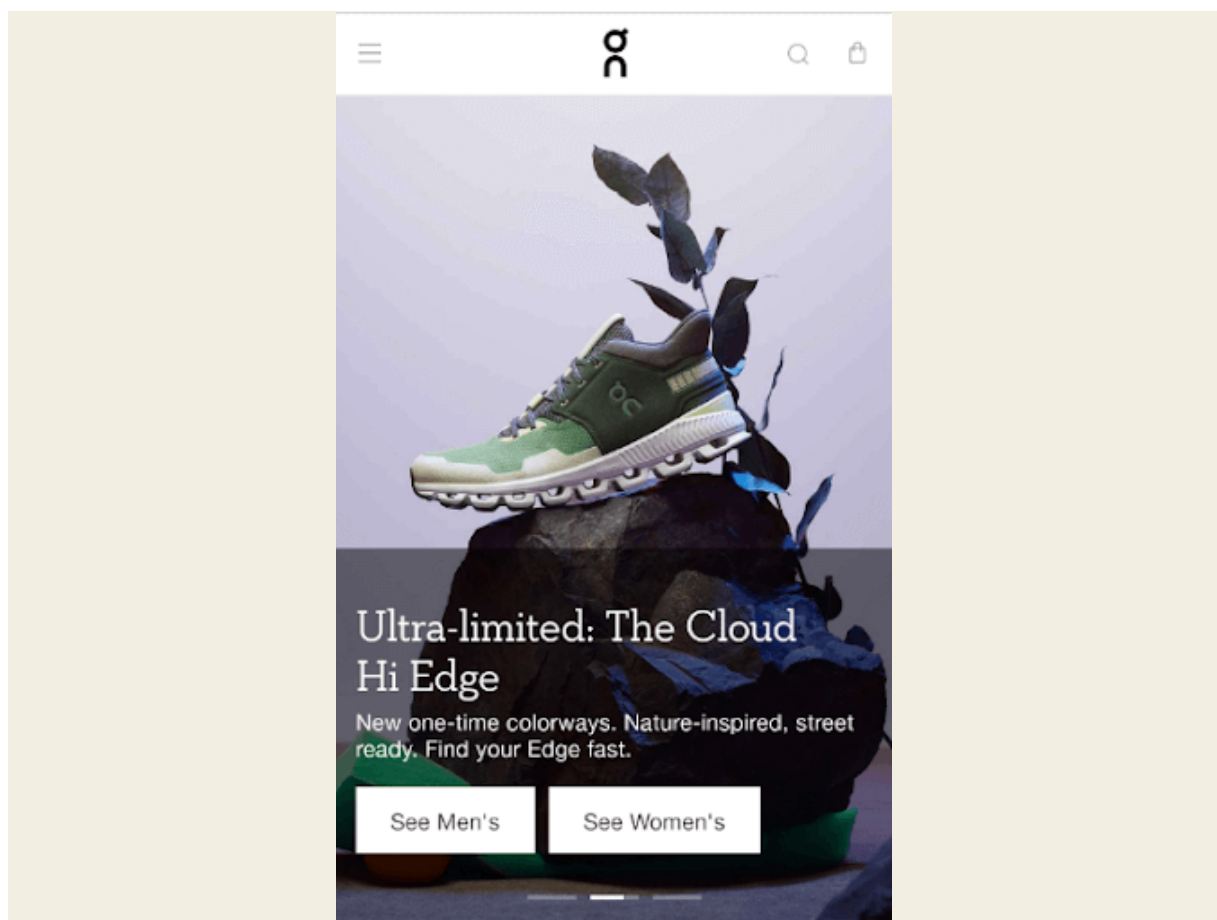

Their imagery is creative without overwhelming the product they are showcasing, which highlights the uniqueness of their technology. The product pages offer clear, useful product data, as well as having a brief explanation of what each shoe is for (something that can be confusing for non-experts). They also have a really nice interface for adding products to compare:
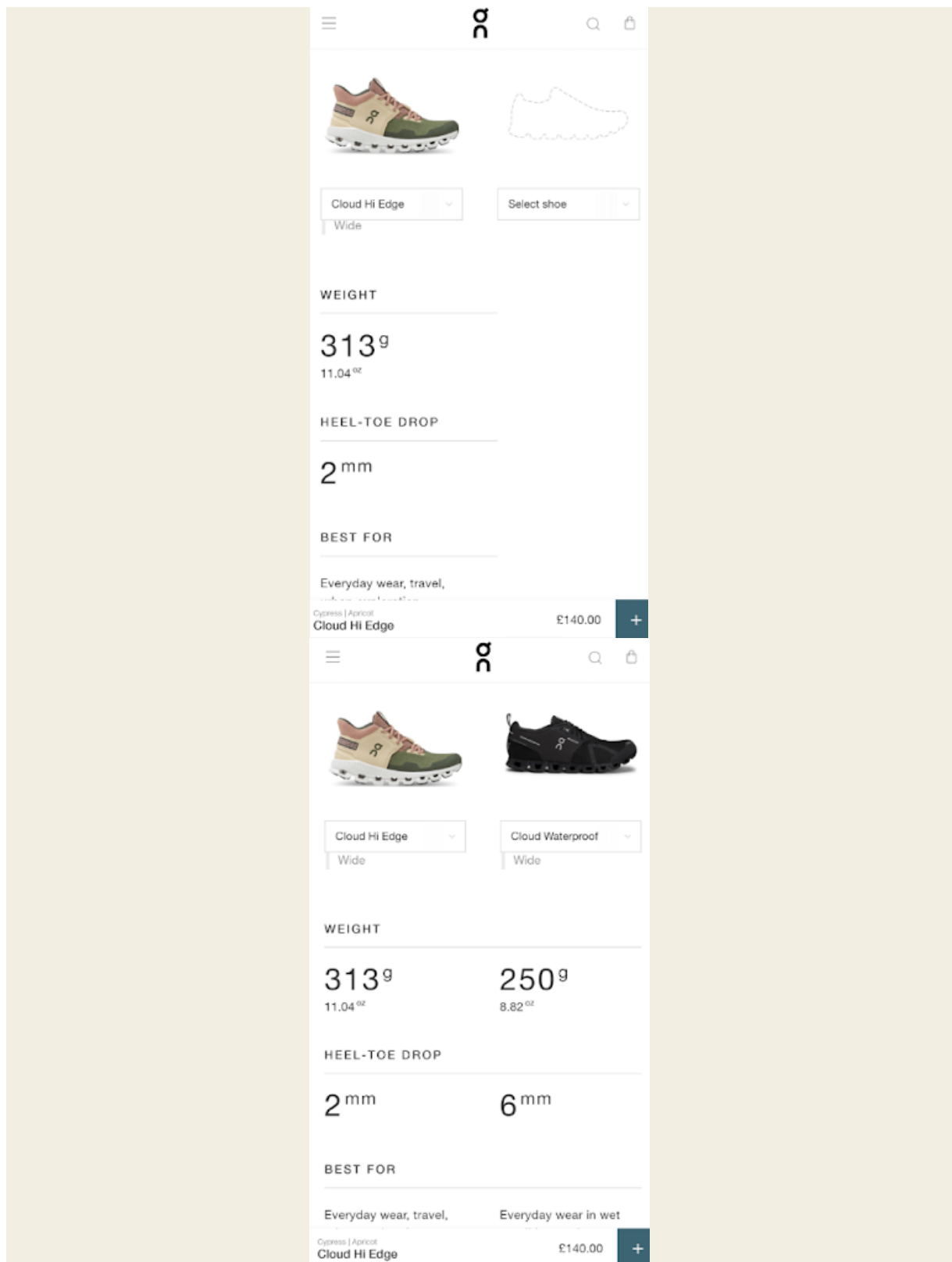
This keeps customers on page rather than routing them back out to category pages or a specific comparison tool.

They also have an excellent shoe selector. This can be surprisingly hard to do, especially for retailers who are trying to combine product data from

multiple suppliers which frequently comes in different formats and units. It's a bit more straightforward for brands, but On Running have pulled it off excellently:
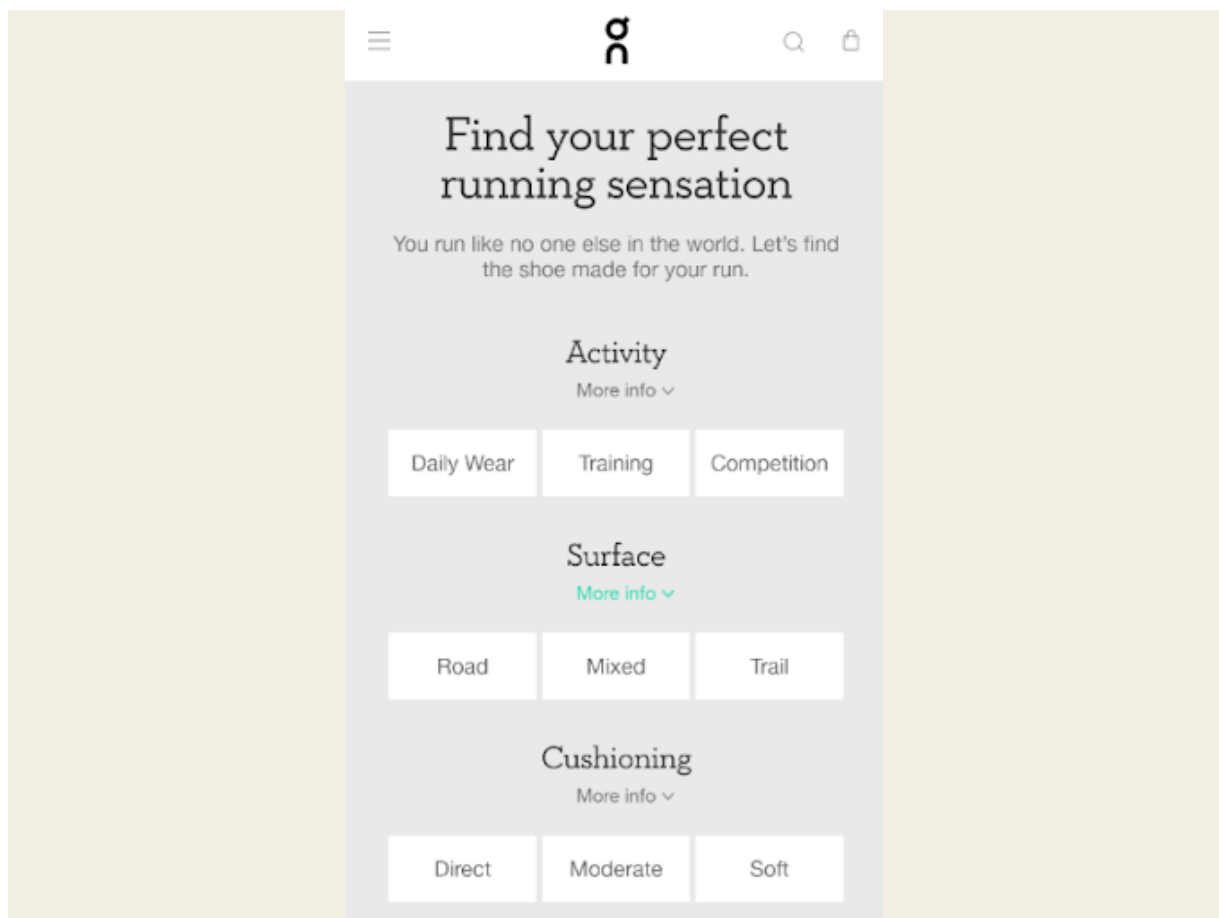
And shortening the purchase funnel with a quick add option for their recommend shoe:
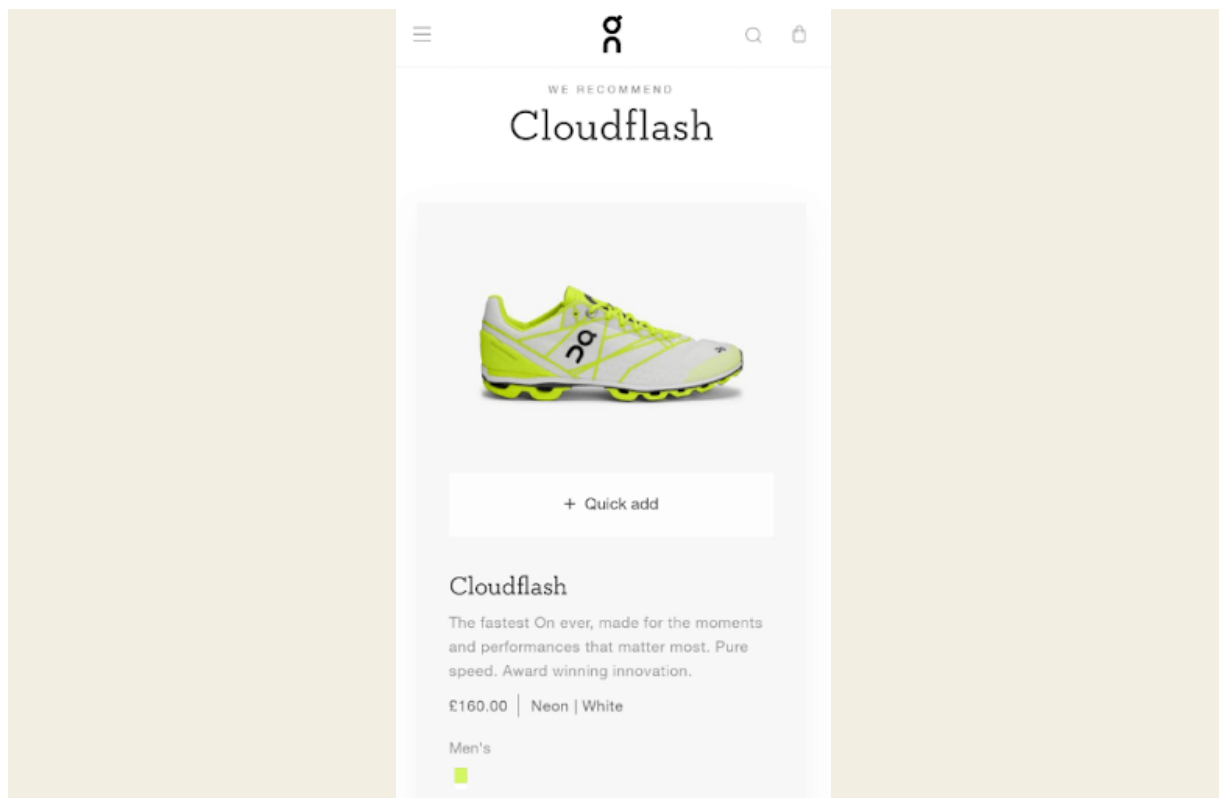
What they do well

1. Imagery and brand match the unusual nature of the product
2. Simple, single-page product comparison
3. Best in class product selector

All of these examples take different approaches to their e-commerce offering, but what they do all share is an approach that is self-consistent, choosing one or two features to do really well rather than overwhelming customers with bells and whistles. While there are a lot of good e-commerce plug ins and interaction types, throwing too many of them into one website can be distracting to the customer and ultimately counterproductive.

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