The Best Rock Climbing Rope

Overview | Ratings | Price vs. Value Chart | Buying Advice | How We Test

To keep you from hanging on indecision, we researched 43 climbing ropes then tested the best 9 side by side. From granite big walls in Yosemite to cragging on the limestone cliffs of Kalymnos, we untangled the details and considered the diversity climbing styles and rock types. We climbed as much as possible- from sport projects to sandstone towers, multi-pitch routes, aid climbing and alpine ventures. We also considered weight on long approaches and big sends. All of the ropes meet industry standards for safety so we took the time to focus on details that climbers will appreciate. We flaked, coiled, climbed, and carried all of these ropes in a wide range of applications to help you find the right rope for you, whether you want the overall best, lowest price, or a workhorse champion.

Read the full review below >

Test Results and Ratings

Displaying 1 - 5 of 9

<< Previous | View All | Nex

Rank	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
Product	 **Mammut Infinity** Read the Review Video	 **Edelrid Eagle Light** Read the Review	 **Sterling Fusion Ion R** Read the Review	 **Sterling Fusion Nano IX** Read the Review	 **Sterling Marathon Pro** Read the Review
Awards	Editors' Choice			Top Pick	Top Pick
Price	$270 USD List	$270 USD List	$246 USD List	$261 USD List	$257 USD List
Overall Score	0 **73** 100	0 **72** 100	0 **72** 100	0 **72** 100	0 **69** 100
Star Rating	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★☆
Pros	Good balance of weight, handling, catch, and durability	Supple handling	Exceptional handling, lower weight	Extermely light, pleasant handling, rated as a single, half and twin	Light for its diameter, extra th sheath that increases durabili
Cons	An all-arounder, so not specialized	Heavier than other ropes of the same diameter, high impact force rating	Reduced durability, above average price	Low durability, expensive	Worse handling than the skinn options
Ratings by Category	**Mammut Infinity**	**Edelrid Eagle Light**	**Sterling Fusion Ion R**	**Sterling Fusion Nano IX**	**Sterling Marathon Pro**
Weight - 20%	0 **7** 10	0 **6** 10	0 **7** 10	0 **9** 10	0 **5** 10
Catch - 15%	0 **7** 10	0 **7** 10	0 **8** 10	0 **8** 10	0 **8** 10
Handling - 40%	0 **7** 10	0 **8** 10	0 **9** 10	0 **8** 10	0 **6** 10
Durability - 25%	0 **8** 10	0 **7** 10	0 **4** 10	0 **4** 10	0 **9** 10
Specs	**Mammut Infinity**	**Edelrid Eagle Light**	**Sterling Fusion Ion R**	**Sterling Fusion Nano IX**	**Sterling Marathon Pro**
Diameter	9.5 mm	9.5 mm	9.4 mm	9.0 mm	10.1 mm
Weight	58 g/m	62 g/m	57 g/m	52 g/m	63 g/m
Certified Use	single	single	single	singe, half, twin	single

Expand to show full specification table | Hide details

Analysis and Award Winners

Review by:
Jack Cramer and
McKenzie Long

Last Updated:
Friday
May 26, 2017

Share:

Updated May 2017
Spring and Summer climbing trips are being planned, and we updated this review to help you find the right rope to pack along. Our Editors' Choice Award winner received an update in new colors and a bi-pattern design, which we detail in the individual review. Our test metrics now include charts for quick comparisons between products in key performance areas, and we highlight the pros and cons of the award winners below. Get a rope and get climbing!

Best Overall Rock Climbing Rope

Mammut Infinity

Editors' Choice

$270 USD List
List Price

See It

- Good balance of weight
- Handling
- Durability
- Catch
- An all-arounder
- Not specialized

The Editors' Choice award goes to the **Mammut Infinity**! This 9.5mm rope is among the most durable while offering versatility as well. At 58 grams per meter, the Infinity is one of the lightest ropes in our test. A medium diameter and light weight make it appealing for long approaches and multi-pitch climbs. Whether you choose to belay with a Gri-Gri or an ATC style device, it handles smoothly. The Teflon coating protects from dirt and grime, therefore extending the life of the rope. If we had to buy only one rope for all of our climbing applications, we would pick the Infinity. Mammut offers a range of coating treatments- Classic, Protect, and Dry- as well as two color options. Available color options have changed since the date of our review — lime green and a bi-pattern blue are available in the Dry treated versions. There has also been a slight price increase.

Read Full Review: Mammut Infinity

Best Bang for the Buck

Sterling Evolution Velocity

Best Buy

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Table of Contents

$238 USD List
List Price

See It

- Light for the diameter
- Smooth handling
- Worse handling than skinnier options

The 9.8 mm **Sterling Evolution Velocity**, weighing 62 g/m, hovers at the lighter end of our workhorse rope classification. This allows it to have a long lifespan without being too burdensome to carry. It provides the ideal balance of durability and smooth handling while keeping the price relatively low as well. This earns it our accolades for the best value climbing rope. This rope can be used for any climbing discipline, from ice to difficult sport climbing, and is versatile enough for the well-rounded climber to bring along on every new mission. We recommend it as someone's first climbing rope, the rope for someone who will only own one rope, or as part of a rope quiver to bring out for the hang-dog days.

Read Full Review: Sterling Evolution Velocity

Top Pick for Best Skinny Sending Rope

Sterling Fusion Nano IX

Top Pick

$261 USD List
List Price

See It

- Extremely light
- Pleasant handling
- Rated as a single, half, and twin
- Low durability
- Expensive

The recently revamped 9.0 mm **Sterling Fusion Nano IX** is hands-down our favorite skinny sending rope. It weighs a mere 52 grams per meter, shedding

unneeded ounces so you can send your project or bust out an epic push in a day. The tightly woven sheath makes it feel thinner than the specified diameter while making it last longer than most thin ropes. With smooth, supple handling, this rope is just plain fun to climb with, however, belayers should use extra caution when catching falls with this tiny rope, especially when it is new. This thin cord will not last as long as thicker ropes, but no other rope is quite so featherweight and fun. Use this as your specialty rope and get the Best Buy winner as your everyday project tool.

Read Full Review: Sterling Fusion Nano IX

Top Pick for Best Workhorse Rope

Sterling Marathon Pro

Top Pick

$257 USD List

List Price

See It

- ⊕ Light for its diameter
- ⊕ Extra thick sheath that increases durability
- ⊖ Worse handling than the skinnier options

Burly enough for jugging and repeated top-roping sessions, the 10.1 mm **Sterling Marathon Pro** earns the distinction of the best workhorse rope. Time and again, this rope has outlasted other models in our tests, proving that it has enough life in it to take the hardest abuse. Weighing 63 grams per meter, it is one of the heavier ropes as well as the thickest. With a relatively low impact force rating of 8.6 kN, the catch on this beast is quite soft and comfortable. For those who like the confidence supplied by fatter ropes or who want a rope that can take a beating, the Marathon Pro is the one that will withstand the harshest conditions.

Read Full Review: Sterling Marathon Pro

Compare select up to 5 products

✔	Score	Product	Price	Diameter	Weight	Certified Use
☐	73	**Mammut Infinity** 	$270 EDITORS' CHOICE	9.5 mm	58 g/m	single
☐	72	**Edelrid Eagle Light** 	$270	9.5 mm	62 g/m	single
☐	72	**Sterling Fusion Ion R** 	$246	9.4 mm	57 g/m	single

☐	72	**Sterling Fusion Nano IX**		$261 TOPPICK	9.0 mm	52 g/m	singe, half, twin
☐	69	**Sterling Marathon Pro**		$257 TOPPICK	10.1 mm	63 g/m	single
☐	69	**Petzl Volta**		$270	9.2 mm	55 g/m	single, half, twin
☐	68	**Sterling Evolution Velocity**		$238 BESTBUY	9.8 mm	62 g/m	single
☐	65	**Mammut Sensor**		$320	10 mm	67 g/m	single
☐	46	**New England Alex Honnold Signature Bi-Pattern Glider**		$244	9.9 mm	63 g/m	single

Analysis and Test Results

There is quite an impressive selection of dynamic climbing ropes on the market. Each rope has a long list of technical specs and numbers which can make deciding on the one that is best for you a bit overwhelming. In fact, we found that comparing ropes turned out to be much harder than expected. All the ropes perform the basic functions of catching falls and protecting climbers, and none are inherently unsafe, so what are the main differences? Obviously, ropes differ in length and diameter, but what about two ropes of the same diameter? Some ropes have special features, such as the rumble strips on the Mammut Sensor that alert a belayer when they are reaching the end of the rope. Aside from this outlier, from the point of view of a buyer standing in a store and looking at two 9.5mm ropes, such as the Edelrid Eagle Light and the **Mammut Infinity** — what can we say about the differences?

After much discussion and collaboration and a close evaluation and comparison of many different ropes, noting how they felt while climbing and belaying, and observing how they perform in real world climbing applications, we were able to find the details that matter. Read on to see what we discovered.

A good climbing rope gives you confidence and keeps you safe. Certain attributes such as handling and weight can affect how easily the rope fits into your day and climbing plans. [Edit this Photo]

Selecting the Right Product

Though this review focuses solely on single dynamic ropes, we're going to start off with an introduction to climbing ropes to make sure you are in the right place. Here we explain the kernmantle construction and the differences between dynamic, static, single, half, and twin ropes. For more technical details on single ropes, refer to our in-depth Buying Advice article.

Kernmantle Ropes

String Theory: A kernmantle rope has two parts, the hollow tube of the sheath (green) and the twisted fibers of the core (white). At the bottom you can see how they are arranged in cross section.

Modern climbing ropes consist of two layers: a strong inner core (**kern**) and a protective outer sheath (**mantle**). The strange word they create, *kernmantle*, is derived from German meaning *core-jacket*. The core is composed of strands of nylon twisted together that provide a dynamic stretch when catching a fall. A tube of woven nylon fibers makes up the sheath that is designed to protect the core and resist abrasion. The two layers combine to produce a rope that is strong and durable, yet light and flexible. It is the proper balancing of these characteristics that produces the best climbing ropes.

Static vs. Dynamic

Using a kern mantle construction, it is possible to make a rope that will not stretch when subjected to a sudden load. This is accomplished by reducing the number of twists in the strands of the core. The result is called a *static* rope and is popular in industrial and caving applications. Belayed climbing, however, necessitates the use of a *dynamic* rope that can stretch to provide a soft and safe catch. This rope needs to temporarily elongate under load to help reduce the force on the gear and participants during a fall.

Static ropes may look or feel similar to dynamic ropes at first, but their uses are entirely different. Modern climbers will occasionally use statics in situations where no stretch is desirable, such as fixing ropes or hauling heaving loads on big walls, but they should never be used to belay. This review will only examine the properties of dynamic ropes.

The Three Types of Dynamic Ropes

Dynamic ropes for climbing can further be divided into three categories, each with their own strengths and intended uses: single, twin, and half.

Single Rope

The single rope system is the simplest and most common rope system. Each rope is rated to hold multiple falls by itself. The leader only has to tie-in to one rope and clip each piece of protection into just that rope. Also, the second only has to manage a single line and can use a convenient assisted braking belay device, like Petzl's popular GriGri. The deficiencies of this method are increased drag on wandering pitches, no redundancy, and the need for a second rope or tagline to complete long rappels.

McKenzie Long sport climbing in the Owen's River Gorge, CA, a place notorious for being hard on ropes that proved to be an excellent testing ground. Sport climbing is done using a single dynamic rope. [Edit this Photo]

Twin Ropes

The simplest of the two rope systems is called twin. In this system the leader ties into two ropes and clips both ropes into every piece of protection while they climb a pitch, treating the two ropes as if they were a single. Neither rope is designed to hold a fall alone, but with their combined strength they can catch multiple. These ropes are usually very skinny, making it the lightest two rope arrangement, while also providing redundancy, and the ability to rappel a full rope length. Twins, however, are the least popular rope system because of the inconvenience of clipping both ropes and durability problems with thin diameters.

Half Ropes

At the crag the consensus rope choice has settled on singles. In the mountains the debate still continues. Long pitches, wandering terrain, suspect gear, and mandatory rappels strengthen the case for twin or half rope systems.

More complicated than the single or twin methods is the half rope system. Each half rope is rated to hold a fall on its own. They are skinnier, however, than single ropes, which means they are less durable and cannot sustain repeated hard falls. In practice, the leader will be tied into both ropes, will climb and alternate clipping each piece of protection with one of the two ropes they're tied in to. This provides a backup; should the first rope fail, they can be caught on the second. This system is more difficult to learn and creates rope management hassles, but it can greatly decrease the rope drag if the leader is strategic about which rope they clip into particular pieces. Additionally, it can save time for a party of three by allowing two followers to climb simultaneously.

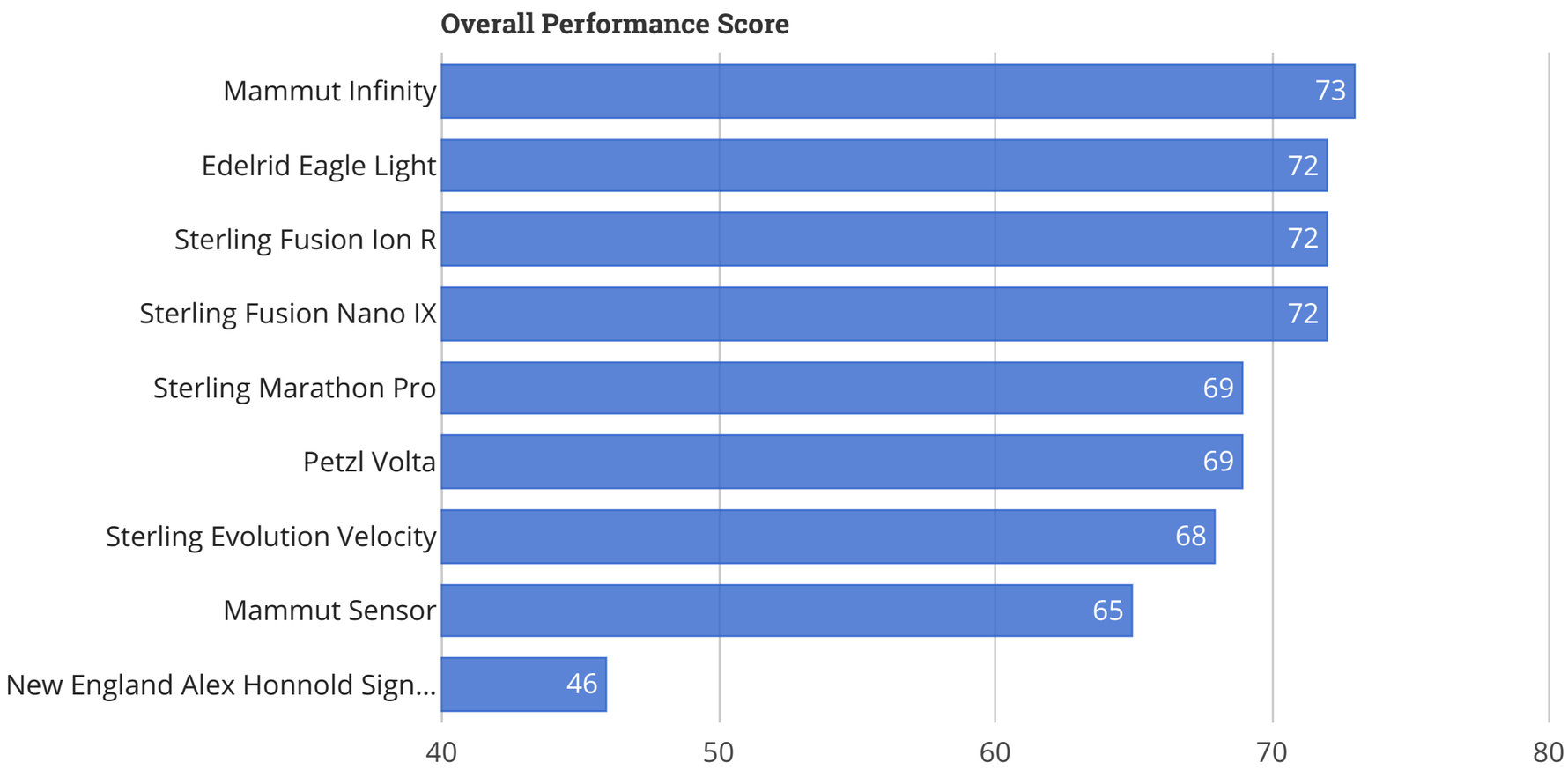
Further complicating this landscape has been the introduction of ropes that are approved for all three systems. These are usually skinny single ropes by manufacturers who are willing to go through the cost and hassle of having their ropes tested for all three categories by the UIAA. The Petzl Volta is one example. We think this versatility is more of a marketing device than a practical feature. One of the greatest advantages of twin and half rope systems is the weight savings. This is sacrificed when the ropes must also be strong and heavy enough to be certified as a single rope.

Two rope systems are great for particular applications like a party of three climbing or routes with sharp edges that require a redundant system. Keep in mind that it is unsafe to combine twin and half rope techniques on any one pitch because it can cross the ropes and potentially damage them in a fall.

A selection of brand new climbing ropes ready for testing. [Edit this Photo]

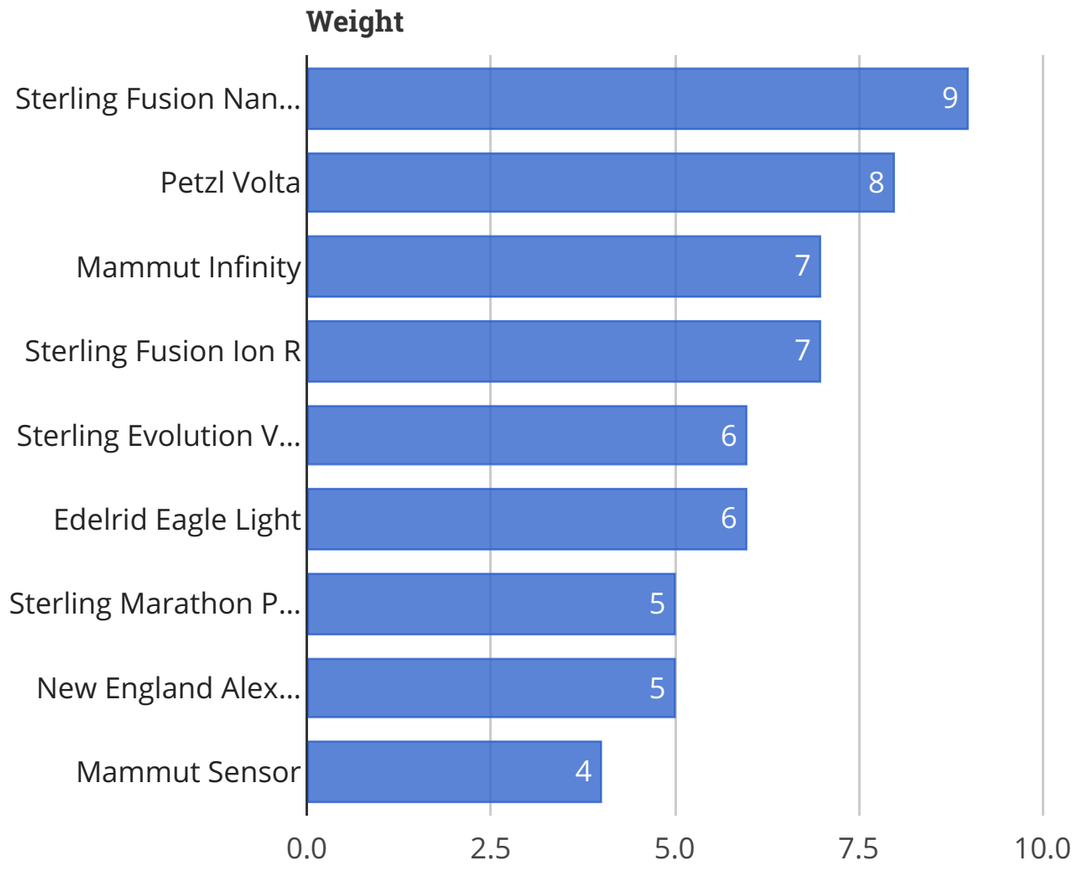
Criteria for Evaluation

We put nine top climbing ropes to the test though many days of sport climbing, ice climbing, and alpine climbing. We have tied-in and taken big falls on each one, and likewise been on the catching end with each rope. We have asked numerous climbers to try the ropes with us, and have gotten a great deal of feedback and advice. Here are our observations and conclusions about which are the best.



Diameter and Weight

Diameter is the easiest and most obvious way to judge a rope. When you hold a rope in your hand, the thickness if the first thing you can tangibly feel. Therefore, it tends to be the feature that consumers focus on the most when purchasing a new rope, with the current trend leaning toward thinner and thinner ropes. However, we think this is slightly misguided. Many people look for a skinny rope because they want one that is lightweight, but modern technology has allowed manufacturers to produce thinner cords with the same amount of materials, and therefore the same amount of weight as a past thicker version. Though this thinner diameter can still improve the handling of the rope, we think that it is equally as important for people to look at the weight of a rope along with the diameter rather than focus on the diameter alone.



Additionally, there is no standardized method of measuring a rope diameter. Some manufacturers will measure their ropes under tension, while others do not, which results in quite different measurements. In our testing, we have noticed that the feel of a rope's thickness varies wildly by brand. For instance, the 9.2mm **Petzl Volta** feels much thicker than the 9.4mm Sterling Fusion Ion R, proving that it is difficult to assess a rope on the listed diameter alone.

Rope weights are measured in grams per meter increments since the variable length of climbing ropes changes the total weight. (Obviously, a 70 meter will always be heavier than a 50 meter, no matter the diameter.) A rope is typically the heaviest single piece of climbing equipment used. Using a lightweight rope will keep your pack lighter on the approach and the difficulty of clipping down when you have led a mega pitch at Indian Creek and are hauling the weight of the entire rope for your desperate anchor clip. This is where the skinny sending ropes shine. But keep in mind that a lighter, skinnier rope will not last as long as something thicker.

Adam Selby sending at the Secret Garden, Kalymnos, Greece while climbing on the super supple 9.2 mm Edelrid Eagle Light.

For the purposes of this review, we have categorized the ropes into three groups based on diameter and weight and also application since different diameters work better for different uses.

Thick Workhorse Ropes — (10.2 — 9.8 mm or >60 g/m)
Ropes are like runway models; diameters that were once the norm are now considered fat. Don't let society or your partner's shallowness stop you from considering a larger rope that will easily outlast the skinnier competition.
Ideal Uses: gyms, big walls/aid climbing, extended top-roping, locations with rough rock
+ Durable, best value
- Heavy, bulky, sometimes too much friction

Ropes in our test that fall into this category are:
Sterling Evolution Velocity, 9.8mm
Sterling Marathon Pro, 10.1mm
Mammut Sensor, 10mm
New England Alex Honnold Signature Glider, 9.9mm

Medium All-Around Ropes — (9.7-9.4 mm or 55-60 g/m)
The middle road of ropes provide the most versatility and are also the most popular. One of these would be our recommendation for first-time shoppers.
Ideal Uses: Sport or trad climbing, multi-pitch, top roping, ice climbing, etc... anything!
+ Good balance between weight and durability
- A compromise for some specific uses

The all-around products that we tested are:
Edelrid Eagle Light, 9.5mm
Sterling Fusion Ion, 9.4mm
Mammut Infinity, 9.5mm

Skinny Sending Ropes — (<9.4 mm or <55 g/m)
New technologies have recently brought single ropes into the sub 9mm range. The weight savings can be substantial, but it comes with a high price tag and lower longevity.
Ideal Uses Alpine climbing, hard redpoints, freeing big walls
+ Lowest weight and friction
- Decreased durability, care needed to catch falls

The super skinny cords we tested are:
Petzl Volta, 9.2mm
Sterling Fusion Nano IX, 9mm

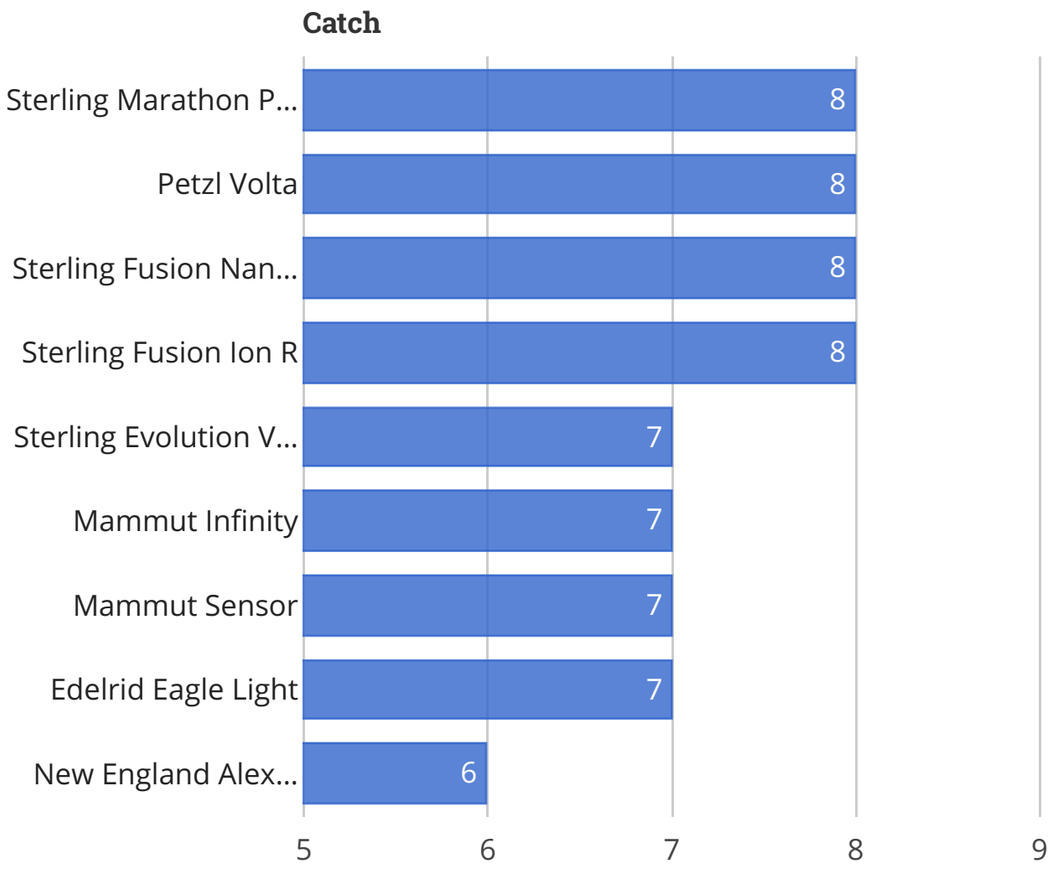
After comparing the specs of all the ropes in our test, we have noticed some interesting variances in regards to weight. The lightest rope in our review was predictably also the skinniest, the **Sterling Fusion Nano IX**, 9.0mm at 52 g/m. But the heaviest was not the thickest. The 10.0mm Mammut Sensor weighs 67 g/m, but the 10.1mm Sterling Marathon Pro, while slightly thicker, weighs quite a bit less at 63 g/m. Even ropes of the same diameter do not necessarily compare in weight. The 9.5mm **Mammut Infinity** weighs 58 g/m while the **Edelrid Eagle Light**, with an identical diameter, weighs more at 62 g/m, which is incidentally the same weight as the thicker 9.8mm Sterling Evolution Velocity.

Needless to say, the diameter has some correlation to the weight, but as you can see, it does not always accurately predict how much a rope will weigh, which is why we think both weight and diameter should be considered together in your search for a new rope.

The Mammut Infinity (blue and yellow) with the Edelrid Eagle Light in the foreground. Both of these 9.5mm ropes are excellent for all-around use in just about any climbing application. They scored very near each other in our metrics, with the Infinity edging ahead with lighter weight (58 g/m vs. 62) and higher durability. The Edelrid, however, it more supple with slightly smoother handling. [Edit this Photo]

Catch

Catch is an extremely subjective metric to measure. After many a fall on each of our test ropes, we found it difficult to quantify exactly which ropes have the best catches, mainly because there are so many other factors that contribute to the comfort or softness of a catch. How much rope you have out before the fall, how far above a piece of protection you are, and the motion of your belayer all have an effect on the catch. If your belayer is paying attention and jumps slightly, your fall will be more pleasant.



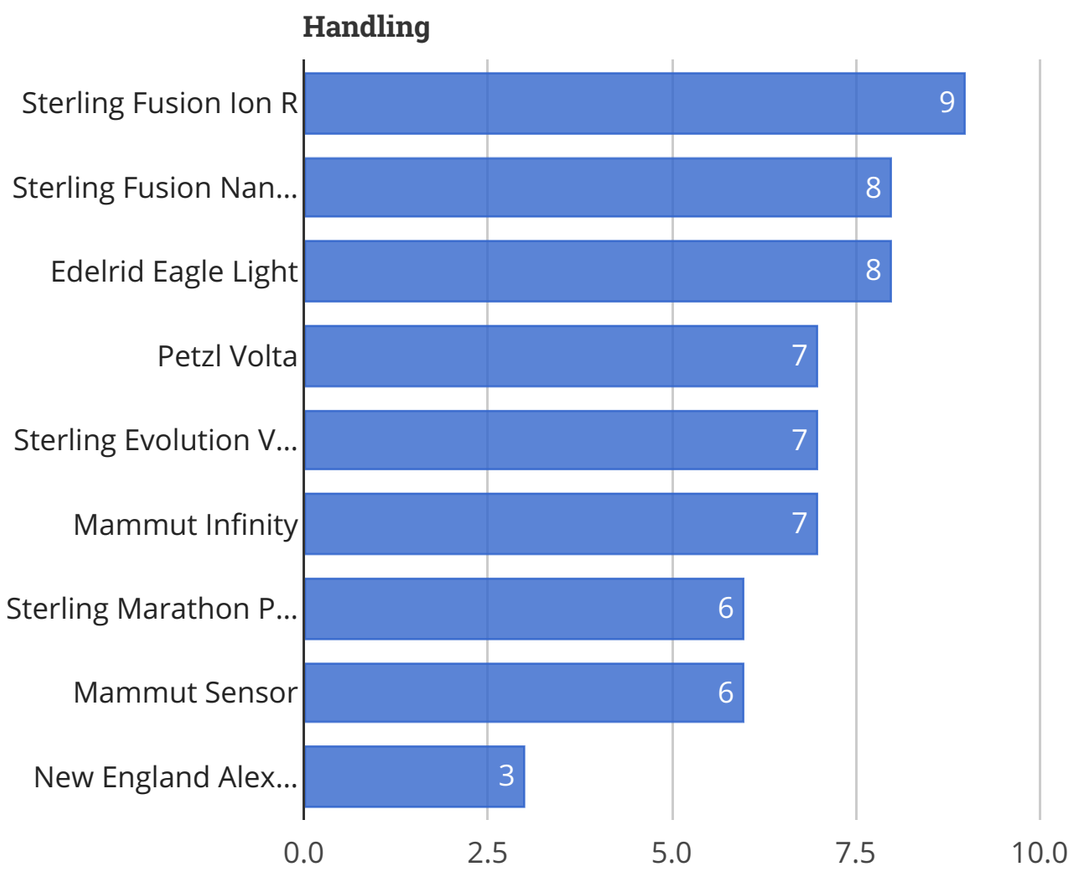
So, to more objectively rate each rope, we took a look at impact force ratings. The reigning wisdom is that the lower the impact force rating (in kiloNewtons), the less force is applied to the falling climber, ie the softer the catch. After giving out our awards for Editors' Choice, Best Buy, and two Top Picks we realized that each of these ropes have impact forces are all close to each other, somewhere between 8.5 and 8.8 kN. So we took a look at our old review. All of our award winners then were also inside that range, while the lowest scoring ropes each had impact forces outside this range. We're beginning to think that this may not be a coincidence but an actual preference by our testers.

The rope in this test with the lowest impact force rating is the Sterling Fusion Nano IX, with a rating of 8.5 kN, while the highest impact force rating is found in the New England Alex Honnold Glider, with a rating of 9.5 kN.

Exploring the elasticity of the Mammut Sensor. It withstood ten falls in the UIAA's drop test and placed in the middle of the pack for impact force and dynamic elongation.

Handling

This category describes our overall impression of using each rope. We evaluated each model on its suppleness and the overall feel while carrying, coiling, climbing, clipping, and belaying. Does it feed well while you pay out slack to the leader? Is it easy to pull up and clip into your protection? Are you ruining your shoulder when you belay a follower from above using an ATC style device in auto-block mode, or does it feed smoothly?



In general, the lighter thinner ropes handle the best. Thinner diameters allow the ropes to be more flexible and the light weight makes them less cumbersome to carry and clip. The most supple ropes in our test were the two skinny Sterlings, the Ion R and Nano IX, as well as the **Edelrid Eagle Light**. By far the worst rope to use was the New England Alex Honnold Glider. This wire-like rope is so stiff that it feels like you need to force it through a belay device, resulting in short-roped leaders and exhausted belayers.

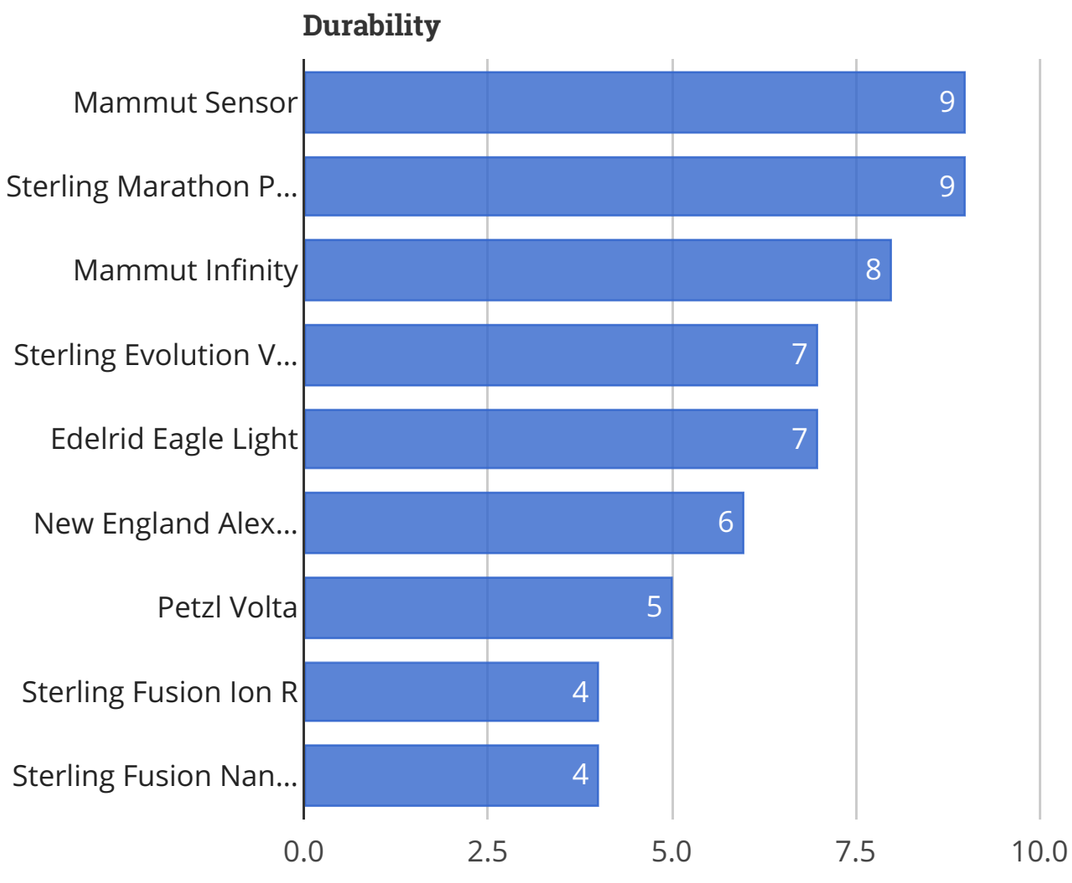
Some ropes that initially handled well became stiff after heavy use. Here is a comparison between three diffrent workhorse ropes at the end of testing, from top to bottom: New England Alex Honnold Glider, Mammut Sensor, Sterling Marathon Pro. The Marathon Pro felt the nicest to handle when actually climbing.

We noticed that ropes with surface treatments have a much smoother glide when new, and keep this feel much longer than ropes with no surface treatment. The Petzl Volta felt slippery when first out of the package, and we noticed that it slipped a little through a Gri-Gri when holding the weight of a fallen leader, but this went away after a couple of weeks of use.

When the Volta was brand new, we noticed that the rope slipped slightly through a Gri Gri when holding the weight of the leader. This went away after a couple weeks of use.

Durability

When you throw down a chunk of change on an expensive piece of equipment, you want it to last a while. A rope is the piece of climbing equipment that gets retired most often, and with good reason — it is your lifeline. However, some ropes still last longer than others.



Overall, the thicker diameter ropes, like all the workhorse ropes, last a bit longer than the thin diameter ropes. We noticed that the skinny diameter Sterling ropes were the first to wear out in our test by a large margin. We enjoy climbing with these ropes so much that we are willing to overlook this fault, but keep in mind that these thin ropes will have the least amount of life in them.

Ropes with surface treatments, whether a dry treatment or a different type of coating designed to enhance durability and handling, do seem to stay newer longer than ropes without treatments. The coatings prevent the ropes from picking up dirt and absorbing water, prolonging the new, smooth feeling. Some models come standard with treatments, while other brands sell ropes with different treatment options. We suggest purchasing a rope with a dry treatment if you can afford it, mostly because it extends the life of your rope.

Another variable that we found to at least somewhat correlate to durability is the sheath percentage. Most manufacturers are now providing a spec that lists the percentage of the rope's weight that is devoted to just the sheath. Since most people retire a climbing rope when the sheath shows significant wear, the durability of the sheath obviously matters. Clearly this spec can be a little misleading when comparing ropes of different weights. A heavier rope with less percentage of sheath can still have a thicker sheath than a lightweight rope with a higher percentage of sheath. But, when comparing ropes of similar weight, this spec can give you some idea of how thick the sheath is, and therefore how abrasion resistant it will be.

Conclusion

A good climbing rope gives you confidence and keeps you safe. Certain attributes such as handling and weight can affect how easily the rope fits into your day and climbing plans. [Edit this Photo]

As a fundamental part of any climber's crag pack, a rope is more than a decision of just a cool color. At first glance, the multitude of ropes on the market have an extensive list of numbers and specs all while tending to look quite similar. We hope that this review helps you to make an informed decision on the rope that will not only help to keep you safe, but fit your climbing lifestyle as well. For more information on choosing the best rope to purchase, check out our **Buying Advice** article. To fully flesh out your climbing kit, take a look at our **Dream Rock Climbing Gear** list to find the gear that will compliment your new rope.

— Jack Cramer and McKenzie Long

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