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'Public transport is cool': new Adidas trainers double as Berlin transit passes

Hundreds queued for today's release – with the €180 shoes doubling as €700+ transport tickets, it wasn't just the usual sneakerheads

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Holly Young in Berlin

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Outside Overkill, a hip shoe store in Berlin's Kreuzberg district, breakfast is being served: Mettbrötchen, minced raw pork on a bread roll. "This isn't a hipster breakfast," explains Julian Kalitta of Overkill. "It is typical old-school Berlin – something you can imagine one of the city's tram drivers eating before work."

It's a fitting treat for the hundreds of people who have camped out in the snow, some since Saturday, waiting for the limited release of 500 pairs of the new EQT Support 93/Berlin shoe – an unlikely collaboration between Adidas and BVG, the city's transport company.

The shoes, which feature the same camouflage pattern used on the city's train seats, double up as an annual transit pass. It's embedded in the tongues of the trainers, which are styled as a fabric

version of the BVG annual ticket, and can be used just like a regular ticket covering the bus, tram and underground in zones A and B. While the cheapest annual ticket available from the BVG is currently €728, the shoes cost just €180.

As a result, the sale has drawn an unusual mix of trainer collectors and those simply looking to make a saving on their daily commute.

“We often see people camping outside for new shoes but this is different,” says Kalitta. “It’s not just the ‘sneakerheads’.”



Shoppers queue outside Overkill in Berlin to get their hands on the limited edition trainers. Photograph: Holly Young/The Guardian

Mihai Vătafu, 28, a graphic designer originally from Bucharest, has been camping in the bus stop across from the shop since Sunday. “I fell in love with the city when I moved here six months ago and I’ve always loved the trains,” says Vătafu. “Wearing the shoes will be a statement; it doesn’t matter where you are from, they represent how you feel about the city. Plus I can’t wait for the moment a ticket inspector gets on the train and I can just point to my shoes.”

But Jana Sträter, 20-year-old student, sees them as practical. “I’m not a big Adidas fan, but I think the idea of getting a ticket for the train is really cool,” says Sträter. “Some people will sell them on but I will wear them.”

Riders will need to wear both shoes, rather than carrying them in a bag or giving one to a friend, to use the ticket.

The collaboration between a transport company and sportswear company is unusual, but the BVG saw it as a way of encouraging ridership.



Mihai Vătafu braved the cold for a box of the new trainers.

Photograph: Holly Young

“The motivation behind the collaboration is really to get young people on to public transport,” says Petra Reetz, who says at first she was skeptical of the idea. “I said, ‘We are a public transport system, not Michael Jordan’ ... But in a big city like Berlin, the quality of life and quality of the air are important. We wanted to tell young people public transport is cool – you don’t need to buy a car.”

It’s also an attempt to modernise the image of BVG, which although attracting more than 1 billion rides last year, is ageing (it turns 90 this year). The visual lynchpin of the rebranding is the camouflage design, which has also been spun into a range of merchandise including baby bibs, swimming shorts and teapots. The agency has also taken an irreverent tone on social media, including a tweet encouraging Donald Trump to become a Berlin bus driver rather than run for president.

The collaboration is also about repositioning the BVG as central to the brand of the city itself. “We Berliners, we are like Londoners – we know we are cool,” says Reetz. “And now we are very cool because we have our own sneakers.”

Despite being sleep deprived, and having waited in both the snow and the rain, Vătafu is delighted to get his hands on the trainers. “I’m too excited to be tired,” he says. Now he’s heading home to sleep and keep the shoes safely out of the rain. “After that maybe all of us with the shoes will organise a night out riding the trains for free,” he laughs.

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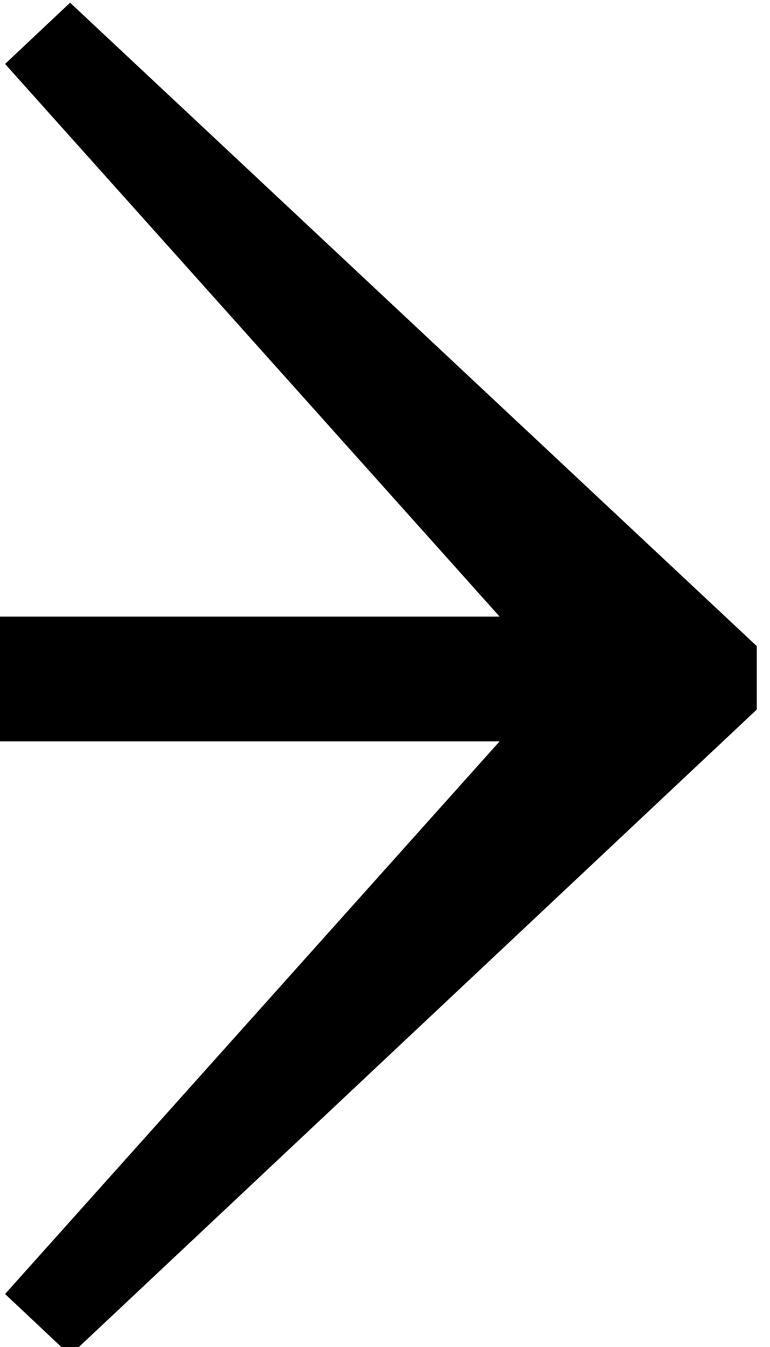
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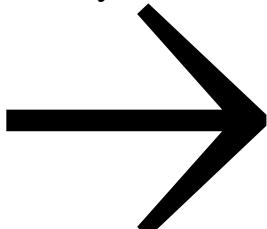
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