

A-list routines: fad or fab?



With the help of top trainer Luke Meessman, we take a look at the latest red carpet-ready regimes keeping the stars trim and toned – and give you the inside track on which kit really works...

There was a time when celebrities kept the illusion alive that they were toned and trim just through good genes or good luck... Not any more. With Jennifer Lopez and Teri Hatcher taking part in gruelling triathlons and even Victoria Beckham pounding the LA pavements to get in shape for her Armani underwear campaign, it seems A-listers have to work just as hard as the rest of us to get fit.

But they do have the advantage of getting to try out the latest fitness routines and shape-up machines long before the rest of us. We asked Luke Meessman, master trainer at London's TenPilates – the workout favoured by Eva Herzigova, Claudia Schiffer, Jemima Khan, Kirsty Young and Nigella Lawson – to give us the lowdown on LA's top fitness fixes. And the best bit? They're now available at a gym near you.



Surfing is one of Cameron Diaz's favourite pastimes, so it's little wonder she's taken to the Indo Board balance trainer (below left) like a natural



Indo Boarding

The big idea Exercises involve manoeuvring a wooden board, called an Indo Deck, over a roller, or Indo Rider, while using your strength to keep your balance. It looks tricky, but takes just 15 minutes to master the basics of Indo Boarding, which mimics the action of surfing and was developed by an LA surfer. Great for increasing your core and leg strength, as well as improving your balance and co-ordination.

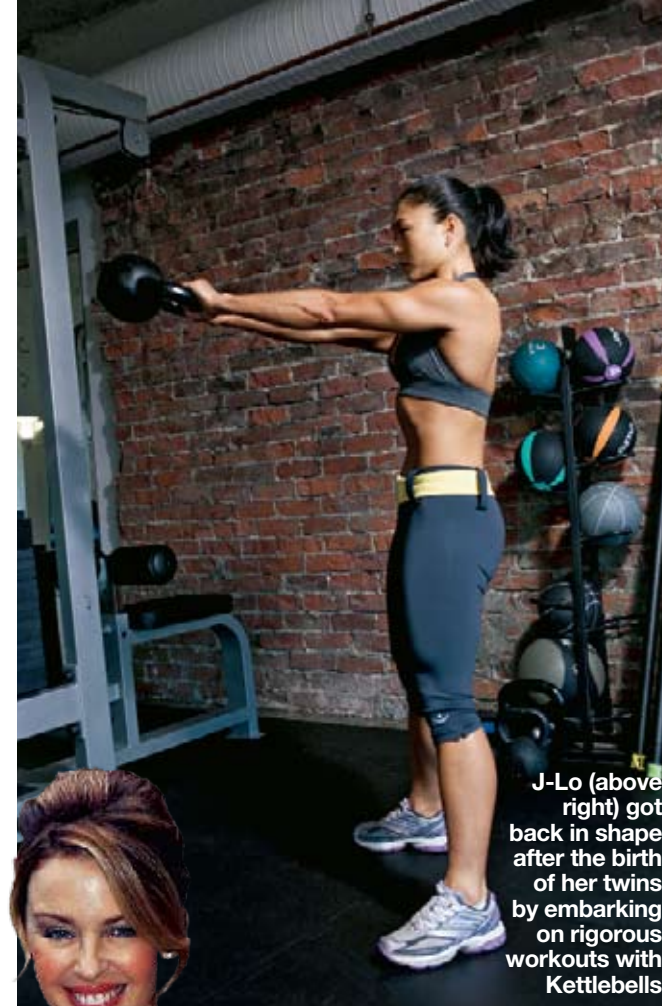
The fan club Cameron Diaz and Ashley Tisdale, who reportedly bought her *High School Musical* co-star Zac Efron an Indo Deck and Rider for his 21st birthday last year.

The verdict "This looks really cool and is a great way of training if you're a keen surfer, skier, skater, skateboarder, snowboarder or bodyboarder, as it 'switches on' your core muscles," says Luke. "I am a big advocate of anything that you have to work hard to control. However, it only provides instability in one plane, and your body works in multiple planes. Instead, I would recommend a board on a Bosu – a half ball – or using an Indo Deck as part of a general fitness routine that includes cardio training. It does look like great fun, though."

The detail Fitness First health clubs nationwide run Indo Board classes – visit fitnessfirst.co.uk.



Kylie (right) is a Power Plate convert – ten minutes on the machine is claimed to give the same results as 60 minutes of aerobics or swimming



J-Lo (above right) got back in shape after the birth of her twins by embarking on rigorous workouts with Kettlebells

The Power Plate

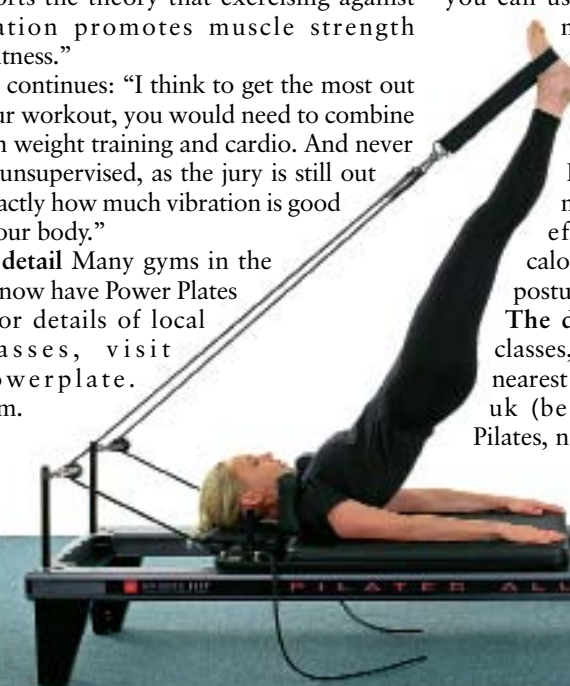
The big idea Developed to keep astronauts toned while in space, the Power Plate vibrates at 30 to 50 cycles a second, stimulating your muscles to make and release tiny contractions as you perform squats, push-ups, bicep curls and other exercises. It promises great results from sessions lasting just 20 minutes, ideal if you don't have much time. It's also versatile – the latest classes using the Power Plate include Power Yoga, Power Circuit and Power Boxing.

The fan club Kylie Minogue, Lisa Butcher and June Sarpong.

The verdict "I have my reservations about Power Plate," Luke says. "Although it works, you should take care not to sit on the plate for too long as there have been reports of the vibrations causing inner ear problems at certain frequencies. That said, the science supports the theory that exercising against vibration promotes muscle strength and fitness."

He continues: "I think to get the most out of your workout, you would need to combine it with weight training and cardio. And never try it unsupervised, as the jury is still out on exactly how much vibration is good for your body."

The detail Many gyms in the UK now have Power Plates – for details of local classes, visit powerplate.com.



The Reformer

The big idea Created by Joseph Pilates for soldiers injured during the First World War, the Reformer has a moving platform attached to springs which give resistance and uses your body weight to tone, strengthen and stretch muscles. Reformer classes can be slow or fast-paced, and can feature up to 100 different Pilates exercises, so it's possible to work every muscle in the body. And the moving platform means your body has to balance and stabilise itself, toning your core muscles in the process.

The fan club Madonna, Gwyneth Paltrow, Marcia Cross, Brooke Shields, Jemima Khan, Claudia Schiffer, Eva Herzigova and Trinny Woodall.

The verdict "Reformers are, in my opinion, the very best way to work out your entire body," says Luke, who cites the virtually infinite number of ways you can use them to improve balance, muscle strength, endurance and flexibility, as well as cardiovascular fitness. He explains: "At TenPilates we also combine Reformer-based Pilates with circuit training moves for a fun, intelligent and effective workout that burns calories, tones muscles and improves posture, strength and fitness."

The detail For more about Luke's classes, visit tenpilates.com; for your nearest Reformer class, visit pilates.co.uk (be sure to specify Reformer Pilates, not mat-based Pilates).

Kettlebells

The big idea These cannonball-shaped weights come in a variety of sizes, with built-in handles so they're easy to lift and work with as part of a combined dynamic cardio and strength routine. A typical workout involves swinging the Kettlebells with extended arms and lifting them above shoulder height to strengthen and tone your upper body. However, they can also be used in the same way as conventional weights to make squats, lunges, crunches and leg presses more effective.

The fan club Jennifer Lopez uses Kettlebells as part of her post-baby shape-up, and when she's training with LA fitness guru Gunnar Peterson to prepare for triathlons.

The verdict "Kettlebells are essentially weights with handles, so it's how you use them that counts," Luke advises. "There's not that much you can do with them that you can't do with traditional weights; the advantage is that you can swing them through a wide range of angles and planes so you get a great upper-body workout."

"If you use them in exercises which involve body rotation, you'll also start to develop core strength. The secret is to choose a trainer who knows how to work with Kettlebells to get the most out of them," he adds.

The detail Kettlebell workouts are available at gyms nationwide. For details of a trainer near you, visit the UK Kettlebell Union at ukku.org/directory.



The moving platform in Reformer-based Pilates (left) has helped give Gwyneth Paltrow her sensational red-carpet shape