



TenPilates

John Shepherd discovers muscles he'd forgot

My core muscles began to scream as I held yet another Plank position on the state-of-the-art dynamic reformer in the TenPilates studio, Notting Hill, west London. After 30 years of working out it certainly was an experience to discover muscles that I didn't know I had, or more specifically how to 'fire', so that they engaged systematically and efficiently into an exercise in the way they were meant to.

TenPilates is the brain-child of former LA based – by way of Australia - celeb personal trainer David Higgins. I was at the Notting Hill studio - one of three dotted around the Capital - to find out why his brand of 'dynamic

pilates' was taking the fitness scene by storm. I'd booked for the 'male priority' class. David explained that the idea was to provide a more

should they wish. The male priority dynamic Pilates classes are more overtly intense than the classical Pilates you may experience in your local club. I actually began to sweat heavily and was working at a moderate aerobic level throughout the 55min class and it was very demanding.

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intense workout, which involved weights - although every exercise was performed on the Reformer – which would appeal to men. Women, it should be noted, can also attend,

Like traditional Pilates, Ten Pilates is designed to readdress the body's natural balance through a series of exact, controlled movements.

Both focus on the core muscles in the waist and lower back area (the centre of support for the rest of the body) to improve strength, flexibility and posture, keeping the body mobile and helping prevent or reduce injury. And both build long, lean muscles by combining exercise and stretching into the routines. But unlike traditional Pilates, dynamic Pilates goes a step further. As the name suggests, it's a more intense and dynamic programme, designed to slim figures, improve posture and build lean, toned muscle, fast.

Based on the 'isolate, fatigue, stretch' principle, it's an impressively effective combination of classic Pilates moves, David's refinements and weight and circuit training techniques.

I'd been on a Reformer about 10 years ago and had used a couple of derivative machines, such as the Gravity GTS machine. Basically the Reformer, as originally designed by Joseph Hubertus Pilates, uses a sliding, horizontal platform and springs – which provide the resistance against which you push, pull and hold. Its modern incarnations utilise the same basic, but very effective

functionality. Springs were colour coded, 2 x red, 1 x yellow, blue and green. Throughout the class and dependent on the exercise David would call out the combination of springs that were to be used for each exercise, thus varying the resistance. The class started with a gentle stretch using a fitness circle. We lied back on the Reformers, hooked the fitness ring over our legs, which were held at right angles to the ground and then pulled on the ring to extend the stretch through the hamstrings and lower back. It was then straight into the exercises and it was tough from the get-go. The first two thirds of the class really focussed on the core, with upper

body work thrown in as well and the final third had slightly more of a lower body emphasis. Note: as is key to the Pilates method the core's functioning, irrespective of limb movement and positioning, is always emphasised. It is centre for all exercises. You are taught how to engage it, drawing naval to spine, in order to ground each exercise.

The Class – my review of selected exercises

Kneeling on the Reformer, with one knee on the stationary standing platform and the other on the sliding carriage, we pushed away from our centre line (using the

Throughout the class and dependent on the exercise David would call out the combination of springs that were to be used for each exercise, thus varying the resistance



carriage), whilst keeping our upper bodies centred, upright and core muscles engaged. A biceps curls, with dumbbells was then added to the movement as we returned to the start position. This was a very unique 'combination' exercise, very much like many in the class – in this case working the inner thighs and biceps as well as the core.

I kept getting my breathing pattern back to front. Pilates encourages the inhalation to be performed with the concentric (muscle shortening under load) part of an exercise i.e. the curling part of the biceps curl, this is the other way round to which most weight trainers will be familiar with. The rationale for the Pilates breathing pattern is to focus the breath into the core region and work the core muscles all the more. We then progressed to a series of planks. Facing the machine's footpads and with our toes up by what would have been the headrest, we extended our legs behind us to extend into a Plank. Palms were turned up and hands positioned slightly apart. Holding the plank was made all the more difficult as the carriage wanted to move – to counteract this you had to engage your core all the more to hold the position.

David walked around the class constantly and adjusted our body positions where he saw the need and in response to whether you

were engaging your muscles in the way they are supposed to. With the Plank it was a case of turning the hips under to set the pelvis into the correct position, so that the core locks and takes the load. I was aware that despite being able to hold a plank for over 5 minutes that I cheated and didn't do it the 'correct' way. As soon as David guided my body into the correct position my entire core began to protest. After a few minutes on this exercise, we moved onto oblique side lifts. Rotating onto one hip whilst fully extending the body over the back of the Reformer – our feet were hooked under the strap at the front to hold us in position. Then with shoulders relaxed and arms folded across our chests we performed a series of side (oblique muscle) raises. I knew I was not initially in the right position as I felt that my hips and gluteus medius muscles were contributing too much to the performance of the exercise. David immediately spotted this and pushed me over into the correct position. Immediately I felt a muscle activate that I don't think I had ever – my external obliques. The small lowering and lifting movement soon had the muscle screaming and me putting on my best zen-like trance face in order to shut out the pain. But after what seemed an eternity of reps I had to

give in and dropped down onto the Reformer for a rest and to release the tension in the muscle. Unfortunately, the muscle didn't seem to receive the neural signal and continued to 'sing' at me rather painfully for quite some time after – you know that feeling that grips, burns and tightens. The exercise was performed to both sides and David's comments about one side of the body being able to either engage the muscles more effectively or being stronger certainly held true. I noticed about a 20% difference positively on the right side of my core compared to the left.

The final third of the class focussed on lower body movements with our feet hooked under the foot straps. We performed, for example, an exercise called 'long spine sequence' that begins with our feet in loops, with legs straight up to the ceiling, you then lift your hips – reverse curling the spine upwards into a shoulder stand, while holding this position the legs are separated and this is followed by a controlled rolling down of the spine onto the Reformer. Once the hips touch down, you then circle the legs around returning to the starting position with your legs straight above you.

Despite the pain on occasions, the hour flew past and I was little disappointed when David called time and we began some gentle stretches to cool down again all based on the Reformer. I would recommend TenPilates – and this particular class – for men (and women) looking for an intense workout, who perhaps think that Pilates is not for them. I can see it working for sportsmen and sportswomen who really want to bullet proof their core and gain control over their muscles and body. It's also a great workout in its own right and coupled with some CV work would shape a great physique. **UF**

To find out more about TenPilates:
Tel: 020 8969 9677
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