

Dynamic Pilates...

It's What You Might Call A Modern Classic



by Lucy Fry

Consider this: there are two different strands of exercise trends, those that stick and those that don't. Of those that stick, there's usually a certain 'classic' element to them; something that, while it may have evolved to suit people's ever-changing lifestyles and schedules, has weathered over the decades, primarily because it works. (Think weightlifting, cycling, swimming and Classical Pilates, amongst others.) Of those that don't truly stick, there's usually a fad element and a convenient melding of two or three (or more) different disciplines and / or a one-size-fits-all approach. (Think Step Aerobics or, its modern day counterpart, Zumba.)

For the purposes of this argument, let's call those two extremes the 'classics' and the 'moderns.' Generally speaking, I'd say that if it continues to work and have the same effect regardless of advances in technology (like running where, while the gear is more high-tech but the effects, such as a perky Vastus Medialis Obliquus and high levels of endorphins, remain the same) then it's a classic. If it sounds more like a brand than a sport or exercise system, or if there's a fair bit of hype around it, then it's probably a 'modern'. They might also include classes designed specifically for gym goers with an hour to spare, like Body Pump, a much loved, group weightlifting class and Body Combat, a 'reworking' (if you're being polite), or bastardisation (if you're not), of boxing and martial arts.

Now usually, I'm a very classical kind of exerciser and a particularly classical kind of Personal Trainer. I like my clients to master the basic movement patterns and get the simple stuff right (like press ups, squats, static lunges and planks) before complicating things. But there is something to be said for modernising even the greatest of classical exercise systems and for certain new(ish) types of exercise that straddle both 'modern'

and 'classic'. Spinning is one such example. Essentially just hills and interval training on a bike, for city types who can't cycle hard and fast around town even if they did have the gear and the inclination, spinning (and various offshoots like RPM) offers a fun, time-efficient and incredibly effective workout.

But Dynamic Pilates is perhaps the best example of a 'modern-classic' in practice. Using a reformer bed and various other props, it takes many of the classical elements and melds them into something accessible and relevant for the skeletons, muscles, brains and busy schedules of people today.

Let's take a traditional Pilates movement, the swan dive, which is done lying on your front. In Dynamic Pilates this movement is modified to isolate the upper back more. Instructors at Ten Pilates will, for example, use a combination of a shoulder retraction, a very simple scapula (shoulder blade) setting exercise, or a modified row, and build that into a modified swan dive, to get the same muscles working in a different plane before getting you upright and utilising those techniques in a functional movement like a lunge.

The traditional Pilates shoulder bridge is done on the floor; it is designed to engage the gluteals (glutes), hamstrings and the stabilisers of the shoulder girdle. Done on the reformer you have to stabilise more because you're doing it on a fairly light spring so the carriage wants to move. Since you have to hold yourself up, and the carriage in, you get more gluteal and hamstring activation than you would on the floor. Then there's the traditional Pilates side-kick which, in Dynamic Pilates, is modified to increase the intensity and therefore enhance the results. Classically, it's done on the ground so you're not working against any resistance; on the reformer, not only is your main gluteal muscle working against the resistance of the foot loop, thus more muscle fibres are activated, but you also have to stabilise the thoracic and lumbar spine more.

And then there's the order of the exercises in any Dynamic Pilates session at Ten Pilates, where the instructors are taught to group two or three exercises together in order to firstly activate and then fatigue a certain muscle group with the aim of challenging participants to the maximum whilst never compromising on form.

Luke Meesman is a Master Trainer at Ten Pilates. He says:

'The major failing about the traditional 34 moves in floor based Pilates is that you actually stay on the floor, you rarely get yourself up and standing, whereas we'll do a shoulder bridge followed by a side lying leg kick, and then we'll get you much more upright into a squat or side lunge so you'll be working against gravity. Using the reformer will work those muscles harder than you would in a normal class.'

These are the kind of details that make Dynamic Pilates an incredibly time-efficient workout that is appropriate to the way we live now; you can work well and hard within the hour (making a lunch-time class a possibility if you work or live near enough to one of the studios) but also, because of the nature of the exercises which aim to build strength rather than batter the cardiovascular system, not have to return to work beetroot-red and completely washed out. And when you do sit back down at your desk, your shoulder stabilisers should be firing on all cylinders so hopefully you won't rotate inwards so much and your abdominals will be switched on so they can support your lower back. Now that's what I call a 'modern classic' in action; a straightforward, new-fashioned exercise system that is time-efficient and a can guarantee results. It's the perfect blend of old and new, a modern solution to modern issues, with a reassuringly classical foundation.

■ **Lucy Fry** is a freelance health, fitness, travel and lifestyle journalist writing for a range of newspapers, magazines and websites. She is also a fully qualified Personal Trainer. See www.lucyfy.co.uk for more details.