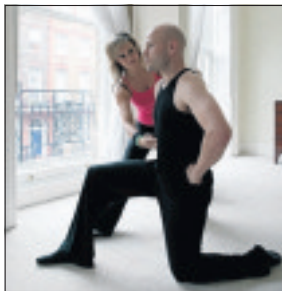


## ► Pilates is for girls... isn't it?

By **Stuart White**

It started when her stomach got harder than mine. 'Come with me to Pilates,' my wife kept saying. So I did, secretly. I mean, I didn't shout it out down the pub – Pilates is for girls, isn't it? This was six weeks ago, before David said it was OK. You must have heard proud Becks announce how 'fitness-wise I am the best for a long time' since adding Pilates to his routine. AC Milan do an hour a day while Andrew Flintoff and the England cricketers are huge fans. Briefly, like the Armani advert, Pilates focuses on core strength in the inner abdominals, flexibility, balance and mobility. Everything

that you ignore while pumping iron. My instructor, Claire, who runs Power Of Pilates, is glad but not surprised that 'more and more men are now recognising the benefits of working deep supporting muscles,' instead of bulking up the big superficial ones. Men still want guns but this helps put everything in order. And keep it that way – injury prevention is one of the key attractions for sportsmen. As for me, a retired amateur footballer, I'm battling control. I want to hammer 20 push-ups and not do four at super-slow speed, with core engaged at 30 per cent and body in perfect alignment. There is no momentum, bracing or eye-popping blow-out.



No race. Technique and focus is crucial and Claire has to remind me 'not to be a hero' just because girls are in the room. But the theory is clicking – I engage as I type. Pilates corrects posture; you can practise on the train. And steel is returning to my torso six weeks from that daunting first session.

# Body Matters

Edited by Lisa Scott [bodymatters@ukmetro.co.uk](mailto:bodymatters@ukmetro.co.uk)

# Shape up fast for summer

**Fitness boot camps:** Want to get in shape for your beach break? We tried and tested three of the best quick fixes to get a bikini body

## Test 1: The Grove's bikini boot camp

**Best suited to:** Those who want to tone that tum but also be pampered. It would also make a hilarious health-loving hen weekend.

**The workout:** Day one, on arrival at The Grove, Hertfordshire, they assess your fitness and you receive a goodie bag of health treats (plus a natty bikini). On day two, it kicks off. A 6.45am rise, a brisk country walk, then breakfast followed by an hour's circuit training on an artificial beach, which exercises you more because the ground is so soft. I was a dribbling wreck by the end of my third circuit.

Next it's fat-burning on a fitness ball for an hour. Then it's lunch. OK, so we got loads of smoothies and a delicious healthy feast but the afternoon was an hour's off-road cycling up and down hills with James and Mark (your delightful tutors during your visit) coaxing us to pedal harder.

Thankfully, time in the spa and its gold pool made it all worth it. I had an hour's lemongrass detox massage. 'The training brings excessive muscle tension. Metabolic waste products accumulate in these tissues so the massage cleanses it of lactic acid and waste products,' says Chris, The Grove's ESPA therapist. Day three also included brekkie and organising our newfound health-busting regimes for the summer.

**The bits I worked most:** My arms and jelly-belly couldn't move the next

morning. After circuit training, Mark explained: 'The push-ups worked your chest, triceps and front deltoids. The 'bent over row' gives you a great-looking back. The squats strengthen every muscle from the waist down.' Furthermore, the fitness ball worked on my abs. Cycling hit my quadriceps, hamstrings and gluteal group (bum muscles). *Chloe Scott*

**Price:** £390 for two nights with Sequoia spa use, a one-hour detox treatment, refreshments and meals included. Tel: 01923 294204. [www.thegrove.co.uk](http://www.thegrove.co.uk)



## Test 2: Nordic Balance

**Best suited to:** Those who want a holistic experience as well as burning fat.

**The workout:** Over the course of two weeks, I ran in leafy parks with a trainer, had two outdoor, early-morning yoga sessions, one indoor Pilates session, an hour of reflexology, a blissful sports massage, reiki, Indian scalp massage and, finally (phew), a functional training lesson, which involved mimicking everyday movements so I can strengthen and tone while going about my normal life.

**The bits I worked most:** My aim was to get rid of my love handles and I managed to lose three pounds by the end of my two weeks, eventually feeling tight and toned all over. The holistic therapies really complemented my physical efforts and I suddenly notice a huge improvement in my mood – starting the day with a yoga session in a park made me feel like I could achieve anything the day threw at me. The two weeks have really kick-started my thirst for feeling good. *Imogen Crump*

**Price:** £295. [www.nordicbalance.co.uk](http://www.nordicbalance.co.uk)



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