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WE TRIED THIS

We Tried This: The SLT Megaformer Workout

Want to break a serious sweat? Try this hybrid cardio-strength-training routine referred to as "Pilates on crack." We tested it for you

By Alexandra Sifferlin @acsifferlin | July 18, 2012 | 1 Comment

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Workouts are a bit like dating: you flirt with different versions of what you like until you find The One. Personally, I'm not married to any single workout routine, and with the ever-expanding market of fitness fads — from anti-gravity yoga to Zumba — I wonder why anyone would want to commit.



SLT

Earlier this week, I spent my evening with a new suitor: a popular exercise class called Strengthen, Lengthen, Tone (SLT) Megaformer. I was motivated to try it because research says that resistance training is as good for the mind as it is for the body, and according to the class description: "If cardio, strength training and Pilates had a baby, it would be SLT."

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On a scale from couch potato to triathlete, I fall somewhere in the middle — usually, I run about 3 to 4 miles a day — so I felt confident I'd be able to keep up with the New York City gym rats in the class. However, when I found myself death-gripping a pair of handlebars on the Megaformer machine, while willing my feet to keep pushing and my quivering abs to hold steady, I finally understood why SLT owner Amanda Freeman describes the class as "Pilates on crack."

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The Megaformer is described as either a miracle machine or torture device, depending on who you talk to. It uses a system of springs and pulleys — and your own body weight — to work your upper and lower body with adjustable resistance. The Megaformer exercise routine first rose to popularity in L.A., where fitness guru Sebastien Lagree introduced and franchised the machine in 2010. Since then, exercise studios using the Megaformer have popped up across the U.S., catering to fitness junkies and professional athletes.

Freeman, co-founder of the online health newsletter Vital Juice, discovered the workout on a trip to L.A. and was instantly hooked. In September, she brought the Megaformer to New York City and created SLT Megaformer. "I never liked Pilates. I felt like I never broke a sweat and had to workout after. This changed my view," she says.

Freeman's classes combine cardio and core workouts in a high-intensity 50 minutes without breaks or cheating — the machine has no mercy. You hold each position for about a minute and, once you get the hang of getting your feet and hands in and out of the machine's straps, the class moves fast.

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SLT classes welcome beginners, but you need to be prepared to sweat, a lot. "It's definitely a humbling class even if you're in good shape" says Freeman. "People bring their private trainers just to laugh at them."

Most of SLT's clientele is female, but it's by no means a girly class. My class of 10 (that's the limit) included a bunch of insanely in-shape women, my struggling roommate, a mom from Nebraska and just a couple of men. "It's actually more challenging for men because they don't work their muscles like this," says Freeman. "There's a class in Dallas that get all the athletes and football players."

Freeman recommends using the Megaformer machine every other day to give your muscles time to recover, though SLT has its fair share of daily devotees. Individual classes cost \$40, and the sign-up list fills up fast.

It's no wonder the class is so popular in New York, since it's ideal for the busy person who wants to knock out their cardio and resistance training all at once. "People think they need a workout that is called 'cardio.' It's hard to overcome that and show people that this is cardio because you are getting your heart rate up," says Freeman.

I can personally attest that the class will leave you satisfied. The morning after, I was too sore to reach my toes, but I felt pretty darn fit.

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