



The Doc is In

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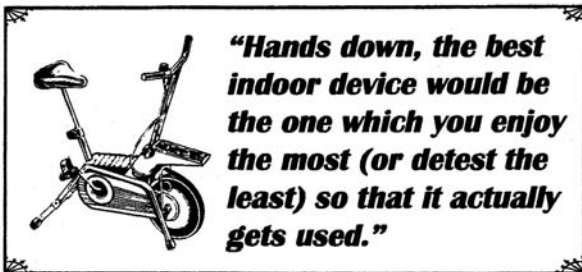
Body Language

Indoor Exercise Machines: My Biased Opinion

by Alec Isabeau, D.C.

You're home from work and it's your one chance during the entire day to get some exercise. Normally, you'd head out the door for a pleasant run through the neighborhood, but right now it's dark, cold and pouring rain. You know you really need a good stress-relieving workout, but... you end up sitting in front of the TV, warm and comfy, but somehow not very pleased with yourself. We've all done this.

One possible solution to this common winter dilemma is to use a stationary, indoor exercise device. Without a doubt, you can give yourself a brutal workout without ever leaving home — what's required is some space in your house or garage, a TV or radio to minimize boredom and, typically, a hefty chunk of change up front to buy a good device.



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Until a couple decades ago, readily available indoor aerobic devices consisted of exercycles and jump ropes. Nowadays, the list includes treadmills, Nordic Tracks, Stairmasters, recumbent exercycles, rebounders, rowing machines, sliding boards, Health Riders, and more. Assuming you're in the market for one of these gizmos, which one is best?

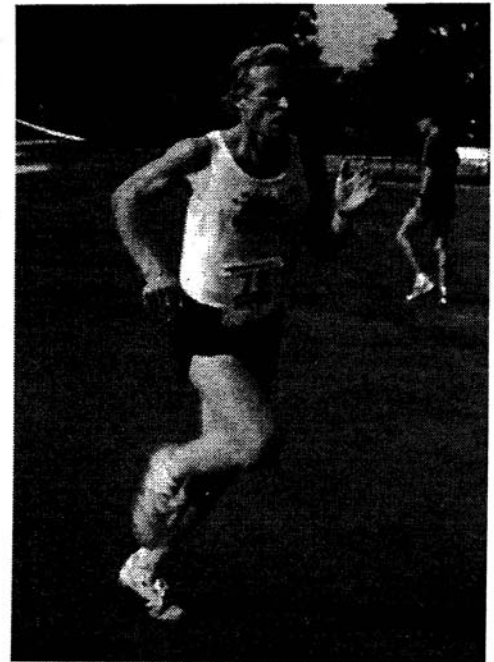
Hands down, the best indoor device would be the one which you enjoy the most (or detest the least), so that it actually gets used. The fanciest,

computer-programmed, high-falutin' gut-buster won't do you much good if you just use it to hang your laundry on. Assuming you enjoy or hate all these machines equally, the other factors to look into include: can you easily get your heart-rate up and keep it up for a long time on this machine?; is the exercise weight-bearing?; does it provide any upper body workout?; does it use full ranges of motion of the limbs?; is it OK for your back?; how much space does it take up?; and, how much does it cost?

Even though they take up a lot of space and can cost a bunch, I tend to favor the treadmill ahead of all the other contraptions. Treadmills provide natural, bipedal, weight-bearing exercise that can range from leisurely strolling to five minute per mile hammering. Good treadmills are motorized and can be elevated to provide a hilly workout; for house-bound runners, the treadmill, clearly, provides the best mimicry of running in the real world.

Next best, in my biased opinion, would be a Nordic Track device, because you definitely can get a monster full-body workout on one of these things and it's actually quite beneficial for your back. Stair climbers and exercycles would come next on my list; near the bottom would be rebounders and the new Health Rider thingamajigs. These latter devices are certainly popular now due to very heavy advertising, but they seem destined to aggravate a lot of low backs and they sure as heck don't promote natural, rhythmic, full range muscle contractions or joint movements. As much as I revere Covert Bailey, his late night infomercials for these gizmos are quite ludicrous.

In any case, if the foul weather and lack of photons keeps you from heading outdoors, then consider snagging one of these machines — again, the best one for you is the one you will use consistently to work up a good sweat. And one final point: shop for a used device — a lot of nearly-brand-new exercise toys are available in the want ads.



Alec Isabeau (a.k.a. "Doc")

The Empire Runner

MACHINES

Addendum, November 2010:

Since writing that article nearly 14 years ago, a few minor changes have developed in the arena of indoor exercise equipment. One is immediately apparent: Covert Bailey's Healthrider, like so many goofball infomercial gizmos, lived a short life and can now only be found buried under other junk in storage rooms and garages, and that's OK by me. Road bike training stands, on the other hand, are far more popular nowadays and rightfully so: cranking out hard intervals on your own properly-fitted road bike is an awesome workout and a terrific alternative on those days when you need a break from running and it's too dark and rainy to ride outside.

An entirely different option for intense at-home cardio training is a kettlebell workout, which gets high marks precisely because it *isn't* machine-based and is very challenging and multidimensional. Kettlebell swings, snatches, clean-and-jerks and get-ups can provide a phenomenal combo cardio/strength workout. This has become one of my favorite cross-training workouts to supplement running and climbing.

Essentially, the bottom line for home equipment hasn't changed over the years: the best indoor machine is the one which you'll actually devotedly use, so jump on your favorite treadmill, elliptical trainer or pogo stick and have a great workout!

Doc