

KEEP FIT WHO SAYS GETTING IN SHAPE HAS TO BE TEDIOUS? LISA SCOTT TRIES OUT THE LATEST IN FUN FITNESS EQUIPMENT

Workouts that work

FLEXI-BAR

When first faced with the Flexi-Bar (pictured right), I wasn't sure what to do with it. The instructions say to shake it, which should strengthen core muscles. And a strong core means good balance, better posture, a flatter stomach and stable back. I go for the easy option: I hold the bar at arm's length and shake it while standing upright (you can modify the workout by lying down or balancing on one leg).

After a few shakes, my biceps start aching, which is good but not the point. The shaking actually sends small vibrations into my body that should 'switch on' core muscles and get them working. Because it's so effective, you're not meant to use it more than three times a week for ten minutes a time. The shaking also makes my fat wobble (nice), so if it's done anything, it's reminded me to have a salad for lunch. But if back pain is the bane of your life, the Flexi-Bar is worth investing in.

Price: £69.99. www.flexi-bar.co.uk



THE X-BIKE

Indoor exercise bikes have always seemed pretty pointless – invest in a decent road bike and get outside, I say. But the concept of the X-Bike (main picture) isn't to promote indoor cycling. Inventor Michael Rice, an avid mountain biker, hopes it will act as a ramp to get people into the real thing. 'As with most sports, it's about confidence. If you can get used to the motion and movement of an outdoor bike at home, you'll be more likely to give it a go,' he says.

To mimic the motion of a mountain bike, the handlebars move from side to side, engaging both the upper body and core muscles. The bike comes with an exercise video that can be played on a DVD player, PlayStation Portable or Video iPod (there's no in-built screen but the PSP or iPod can be slotted between the handlebars).

The video features an instructor with two other riders and, together, you all go on a mountain trail. A steep hill is approaching, the instructor tells me, so I yank up the resistance, get up out of my seat and pedal in strong, slow motions. 'Watch out for the trees,' he yells, so we quickly swerve to the right.

Of course, it's all stationary so only the handlebars move. 'The video is basically a structured workout hidden behind a fun exercise class,' Rice says. He's right: 30 minutes whizz by, my arms are sore from constantly moving the bars and my bum aches from the steep, imaginary climbs. But would hardcore mountain bikers bother with an X-Bike? 'I call myself a weekend warrior,' he says. 'I try to get out on my bike every weekend but, with a full-time job and children, it's not possible to go during the week. So I find myself flagging behind my mates. Having the bike at home means I can jump on it whenever I want.'

By the weekends, I'm ripping it.
Price: £749.
www.x-bike.com



Pedal pusher: Lisa Scott keeps the pace on the X-Bike

FUNKEY HULA

A hula hoop that can be filled with water and has wheels on the inside? A lot's changed since I was a kid. But there is a method to this Funkey-Hula madness. The water adds weight to the hoop, which changes how hard you work. The heavier, the easier because the weight gives it momentum, meaning only small gyrations are needed to keep it aloft. I pour some water out and it's so light that I have to move like a mad woman.

As the wheels roll over your stomach, they break down fat. Funkey-Hula's manufacturers claim the hoop 'aids weight loss, reduces blood pressure and reduces body fat from the waist and abdomen'. All I know is that one pathetic gyration feels like 30 stomach crunches. A few days later, my waist feels tighter but there's a lot of work to do – 30 seconds is my best time. The leaflet warns not to hula for 'more than one hour without stopping.' No danger of that.
Price: £34.99. www.funkeyhula.co.uk

Still prefer conventional exercise?

Be inspired by Sunday's London Marathon; get outside and start running. Here are some tips from personal trainer Dominic Barette: 'Initially, aim for time and run or walk to complete your goal. Once you can comfortably run for 30 minutes, look at the distance you are covering in that time. Run with a plan in mind. A week of training should include one or two long-distance runs, a couple of middle-distance runs and at least one hill session. Run up it as quickly as you can, walk down, recover and repeat twice more.'

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