

Issue 18

01.2023

INDOOR CYCLING INSIGHTS & INSPIRATION

# RIDE HIGH

DON'T MISS

## A GLOBAL CRISIS?

*Our special supplement inside this issue*



ON THE COVER

# FUEL CYCLING

*Meet the community that built a cycle studio*

## New: SciptCycle

On a mission to make  
indoor cycling fun again

## TRENDING NOW

Indoor cycling's top  
10 trends for 2023

## Ukraine's Formula

A haven of normality  
in the face of war

# MEET US IN THE WOODS

PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK/NOVAN

**BODY BIKE®**



**HOUSE OF  
WORKOUTS**

**FIBO** GLOBAL  
FITNESS

**HALL 6 - STAND A13  
EXHIBITION CENTRE, COLOGNE**

**13-16 APRIL 2023**

**“I’d like to see our sector focus on providing fun in a world where there’s currently little fun to be had”**



## A new era of working out

**F**or the Chinese, the number two is considered harmonious and lucky. The superstitious among us might therefore have hoped for better things in 2022, but in the end, it proved to be another hugely challenging year.

As Russia’s illegal war in Ukraine rumbles on – see our interview with Mariia Brezytska, general manager of Formula Wellness & Spa in Odessa, on page 34 – our continued reliance on fossil fuels leaves us vulnerable, exposed to astronomical price hikes for the electricity, gas and oil we need to power our businesses and our lives.

Indoor cycling may not be power-consuming; it can even be energy-generating, as we discover in this issue’s must-read supplement, *A Global Crisis?* But beyond the bikes, ours is an energy-hungry sector.

So, what do we do? From smart facility management to embracing renewables, our experts share their short- and long-term advice in *A Global Crisis?* This is compulsory reading for us all.

One thing is for sure: we must not give up. What our sector brings to society – each and every club, gym and studio – is an essential health service. This is just one more crisis we must navigate, and navigate it we will.

In the meantime, I’d like to see us focus on providing fun in a world where

there’s currently little fun to be had.

After all, this crisis isn’t only affecting businesses. Individuals and families are overwhelmed by their own financial worries, and they are looking for release.

We can provide it. During the pandemic, we spoke to operators who had asked their trainers to recognise the stress everyone was feeling and not push too hard – to focus on making every workout fun and social. Let’s do similar now. Let’s put ourselves out there as places where people can escape and forget their worries for a while. This would be my vision now and, indeed, moving forward. We need to make fitness more fun.

That’s why I’m delighted that BODY BIKE is partnering with House of Workouts, as preferred supplier for its wonderful new ScptCycle programme (see page 42). Targeting women in particular, ScptCycle is about happiness, and it has all the ingredients to be the next global fitness phenomenon. I hope it heralds a new era of working out for fun – one in which indoor cycling leads the way.

My very best wishes for the festive season and a prosperous 2023.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Uffe A. Olesen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

**Uffe A. Olesen**

CEO, Body Bike International A/S



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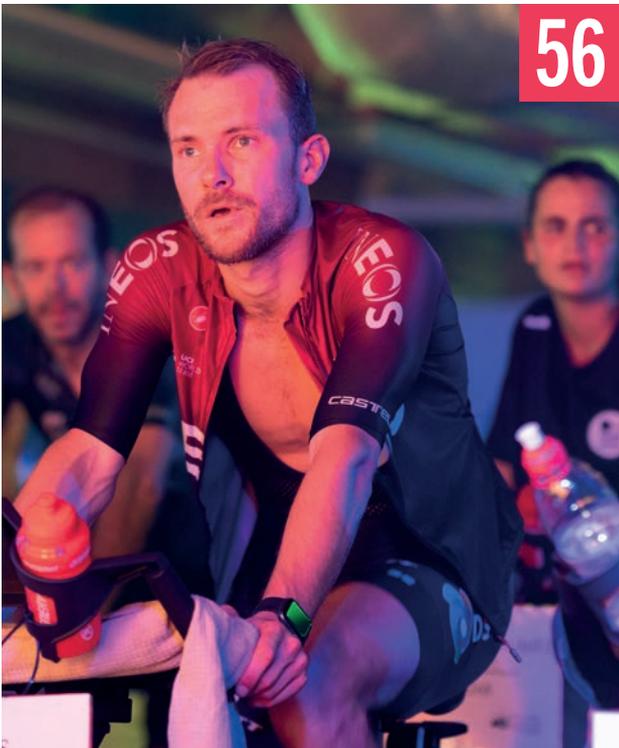
In the Ukrainian city of Odessa, Formula Wellness & Spa has re-opened its doors to offer a sense of normality in the face of the ongoing war. We speak to general manager Mariia Brezytska.

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### **cycling4cancer**

Every year, Denmark's televised fundraiser – *Knæk Cancer* – raises funds for cancer research. And every year since 2014, cycling4cancer's 24-hour event has been part of it.

**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT**

**INSIDE THIS ISSUE**

## **A GLOBAL CRISIS?**

The cost of living crisis is never far from the headlines these days. So, how is our sector faring in different parts of the world? *RIDE HIGH* reports on the challenges and strategies being deployed in this must-read supplement.

#### **CONTENT & CONTRIBUTIONS**

**ALL IDEAS ARE WELCOME – [info@ridehighmagazine.com](mailto:info@ridehighmagazine.com)**

*Do you have a great indoor cycling story you'd like to share? From studio successes to new innovations – and everything in between – we'd love to hear about it. We're here to celebrate and champion the very best of indoor cycling from around the world, so if there are any topics you think we should cover in *RIDE HIGH*, please let us know.*

# Fuelled by COMMUNITY

*Many clubs talk about building a community. Few are built for – and by – a community. Fuel Cycling co-founders Molly Kennedy and Margaret Gabrielson share their inspirational story with Kate Cracknell.*

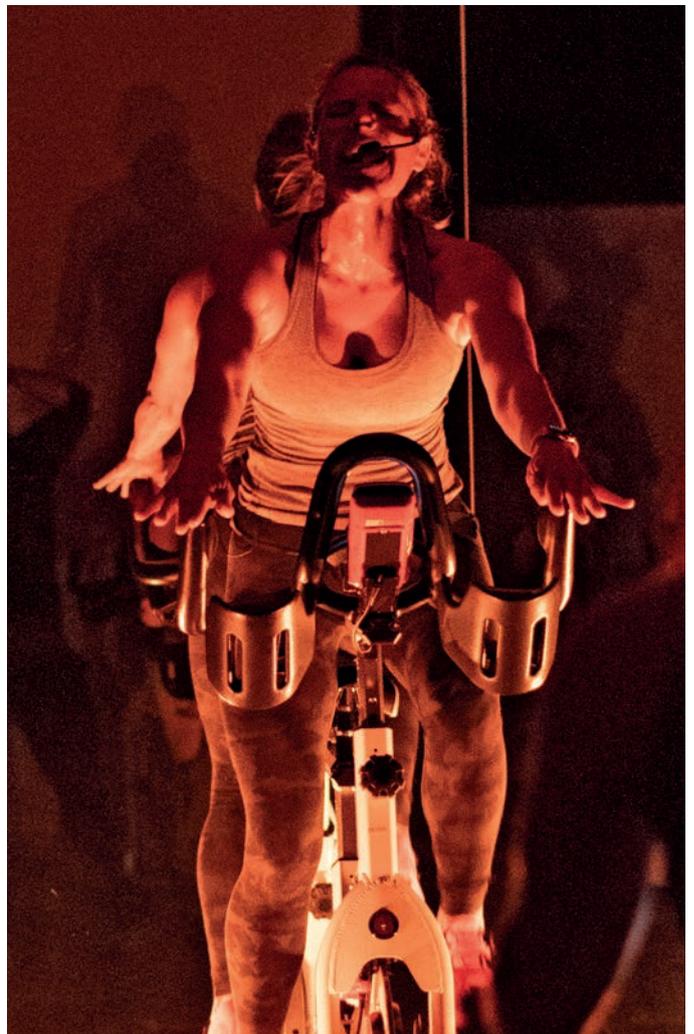
## *What's the Fuel Cycling back story?*

**MK:** Margaret and I both used to instruct at another studio, but we felt something was missing. We made the decision to leave and create our own welcoming, community-focused space.

We started out as an online platform during COVID, with really loyal followers from our previous club who followed us online and got their friends involved too. And then, as we were coming out of the pandemic, a member of our community told us about a space that was available to rent.

And that was that. We opened Fuel Cycling in Monterey, California, on 12 August 2021. At the time we had 20 bikes in our studio – what we affectionately call The Tank – with a warehouse-meets-speakeasy vibe where we have everything you need, without the frills you don't.

Honestly, I had never planned to own a studio. I'm a full-time teacher and that was all I ever intended to be. But we had a community who wanted to ride



*Above: In August 2021, Fuel Cycling opened to an already loyal following in Monterey, CA*

*Right: Molly Kennedy (left) and Margaret Gabrielson (right) are co-founders of Fuel*



**“We didn’t start a cycle studio and then try to build a community. We’re a community that built a cycle studio”**



*Above: The sense of community is incredibly strong at Fuel Cycling, with newcomers instantly welcomed*

*Right: The cycling room itself is fondly known as 'The Tank'*

► with their favourite instructors and we just felt we had to make it happen.

I knew I couldn't do it on my own, but together with Margaret, our fantastic manager Lindsey and our girl gang of amazing instructors – five of us from our old club – we did it. Crucially, we've also done it with the help of our community.

### **Can you elaborate?**

**MK:** When we started, we didn't have much. Neither did we have it all buttoned down from day one. We were warned that we'd never be able to compete against the big franchises and the corporate studios, but we had five amazing instructors, a great manager and a ready-made community who told us that whatever we did, they'd come. So, we trusted our instincts and we went for it. Our thinking was pretty much: "We have bikes, we have speakers, we have music and we have our community. We'll be fine!" And where many corporate studios have closed over the past year, we've grown and grown.

For the first few weeks, the only décor we had was a sign that said 'It feels good to be

home', but together with our community, we've slowly added things over time. We now have a plant wall to which our members have brought their own plants. One weekend, 10 of us got together to paint all the walls black. When we needed mirrors, we put out feelers to see who could help. We've tweaked little details as the months have gone by and we've done it together as a community.

We're also next door to a CrossFit studio and we get great support from them. We operate independently, but we're there to help each other.

One of my big learnings in creating Fuel Cycling has been knowing what my limits are and how to ask for help. Over the past year, we've made connections across our local community – far beyond

“It’s challenging in The Tank, but also hugely encouraging. There aren’t many places I feel as strong as I do when I’m in that room”





- ▶ our original group – as people have come forward to support and help us.

### *How is your community so strong?*

**MG:** As our manager Lindsey puts it, we didn't start a cycle studio and then try to build a community. We're a community that built a cycle studio.

We do nurture this, of course. We're there at local events, competing in trivia competitions as Fuel, raising money and making donations to charity, doing beach clean-ups and so on. We also have our own social events, such as our popular Pumpkins & Pinot ride.

But the point is, we were a community before we were a studio and that shows. When new people come to Fuel, it isn't only our team who welcome them as if into their own home. Our members do the same. They go over and talk to them as if they've known them for years and even help them set up. People spend time in our community and just want to be part of it.

Fuel Cycling is where friendships are born and it's such an honour to be that space. Everyone is there for each other, to the point that members will schedule

**“We’ve had people tell us coming to Fuel is like going to church, because we say everything they need to hear!”**

visits around celebrating milestone rides with their friends, for example, or to be there if someone is coming back for their first ride after an illness. They don't work out just to work out. They work out to see their friends. If they can't make the ride, they'll come to the social afterwards.

Our riders and our staff see Fuel Cycling as their studio, and rightly so. They were there when we started. They've grown with us and helped us when we needed help. They've come to class and they've introduced their friends. They drive our sense of community.

Our rides are great, but it's the people who really make us.

### **What about community beyond the studio?**

**MK:** We saw something really interesting coming out of the pandemic: lots of new local businesses being set up by people – and especially women – who had been inspired to finally do the thing they'd always dreamed of doing.

We spent a lot of time going out to meet them, walking the streets and visiting all the coffee houses, the farmers' markets, the little artisan shops to see how we could help them. Now, every month, we showcase a local business on our social media and we have a Makers' Market in our studio: a cabinet where local makers and merchants can showcase their products, from jewellery to home-made soap to CBD tinctures.

It isn't even about trying to get them to join our studio. It's important to us that we're part of our local community.

### **Tell us about your programming.**

**MG:** Fuel45 – our 45-minute cycling class – makes up most of our schedule. We used to do Fuel60 once a week, too, but our community wasn't quite ready for 60 minutes back then; we may reintroduce it at some point if there's demand for it.

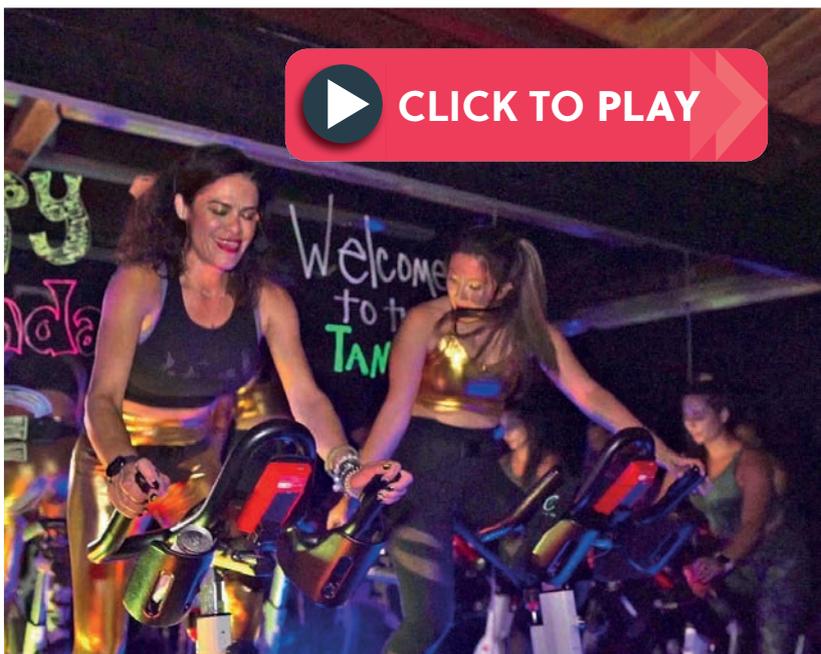
Alongside this are regular special classes: everything from musical themes to our Cookie Exchange ride, where everyone bakes cookies and you all swap them so you go away with one of each. We do a bingo challenge too, where you tick a box each time you ride a different bike. It ▶

*Top left: Most classes last 45 minutes, as this is what members currently want*

*Top right: Fuel's five instructors all worked together at another club before*

*Middle right: "Fuel Cycling is where friendships are born"*

*Bottom right: Fuel Cycling celebrates its first birthday in style!*



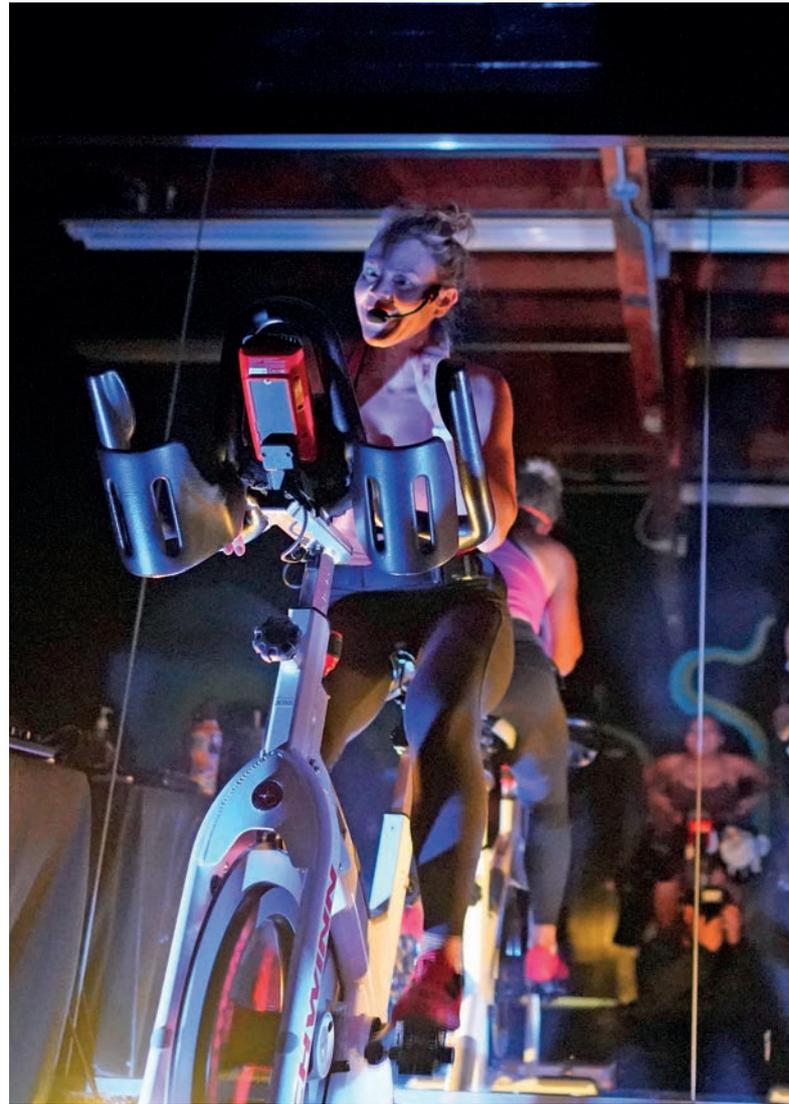
▶ gets people out of their back row comfort zones and shows them they can do it.

All our classes are rhythm rides. The lights go down and it's like dancing on a bike. We do make the rides challenging, but it's all done in such a fun way that people get lost in the moment and don't realise how hard they're working.

Our instructors get off the bike and dance around, they motivate you and remind you what you're capable of; there's no focus on what you can't do. The riders cheer each other on, too. It's challenging in The Tank, but also hugely encouraging. There aren't many places I feel as strong as I do when I'm in that room.

**MK:** In terms of the programming itself, we're fortunate to have five amazing instructors, all of whom were itching to get away from the whole corporate 'this is the recipe' approach. All our classes have to include a variety of rhythms, and must be adaptable to both newcomers and regulars, but other than that we leave it to our instructors to do what feels right for them.

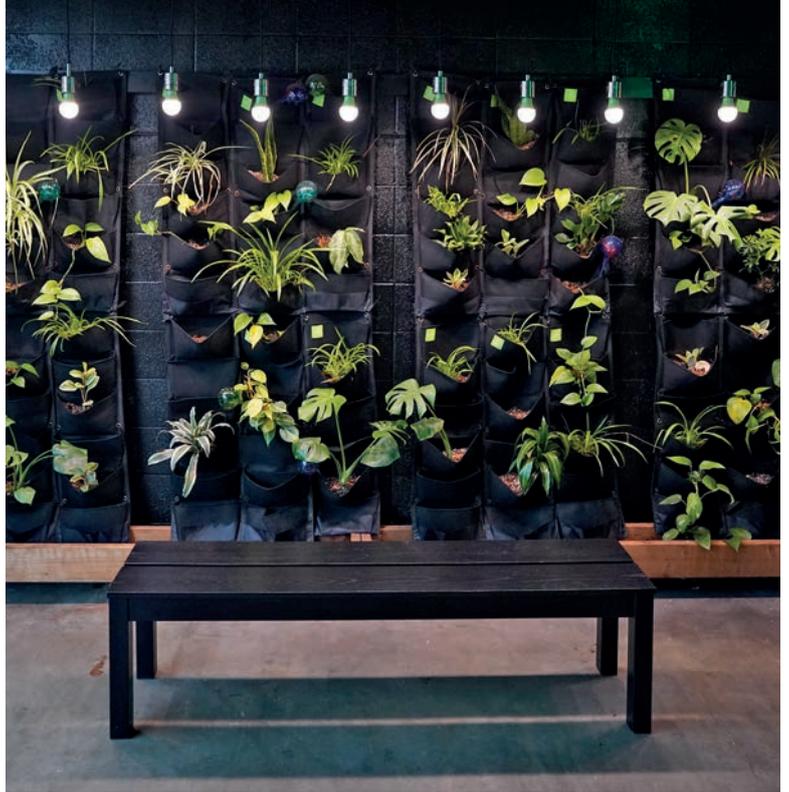
That includes the playlist, which shouldn't just be chosen for a good workout. It should also reflect the instructor and what's going on with them that day. Say I feel like I need a mental boost. I'll start with that and I'll pick tunes and design my programme around it.



*Above: Instructors create their own choreography and playlists, bringing something of themselves to class*

*Above right: The studio has a plant wall, to which members have added their own plants*

*Left: Watch this video to understand why Fuel Cycling was already winning awards just 11 months after opening*



“We haven’t done it the easy way. We’ve done it in a really meaningful way – a way that matters to us and our community”

For us, music isn’t just music. It’s a soundtrack that people should get something out of at an emotional level.

### **How do you train your instructors?**

**MG:** It’s a collaborative and ongoing process. We know it’s in all our interests – and those of the studio – for everyone’s classes to be full, so we aren’t competitive with each other. We do each others’ classes as part of this; it’s fine for us all to have a different flavour, but we can still learn from each other. Nobody knows everything.

New instructors also co-teach with established instructors until everyone feels they’re ready, and we all bring something – different skills and strengths – to help them in their training.

**MK:** The way we connect with our members is also very inclusive: our team knows it’s always ‘we’, never ‘you’ or ‘I’. Everything we do, we do it together with our community.

We also ask our instructors to open their hearts and their lives, because inevitably there will be people in class for whom it resonates: their experiences and feelings, hopes and fears. In fact, we’ve had people tell us coming to Fuel is like going to church, because we say everything they need to hear!

**MG:** Crucially, though, being in the saddle doesn’t make it *The Margaret Show*, and the same goes for all our team. A lot of studios showcase their instructors, but that can be intimidating for riders. At Fuel, it isn’t about what the instructor can do. It’s about making every class accessible, challenging ▶



► everyone in the room to exactly the right level and doing what we do together.

**Is being women-owned important?**

**MG:** We didn't intentionally set out to be a women-only team and we're very open to employing male instructors. However, we are women-owned – and also minority-owned – and I think that matters for a lot of reasons.

At the age of 45, I became a widow with five children. There was a real moment of doubt, of wondering how I would move forward. Could I do it? Was I strong enough? How would I provide for my children? Purely at a personal level, creating Fuel Cycling... it was so important for me to show my children that their mum was strong. That I could do it.

And then there's Molly: a full-time teacher who was also studying for her special education credential at the exact same time we were launching Fuel. I think it's so important for our community, and other women in particular, to see that.

Fuel is part of a wave of new, women-owned businesses that have come out of COVID and it's been really humbling to be a part of that, working to see how we can lift each other up.

**MK:** The funny thing is, though, that we hadn't really thought about all this when we set out to create Fuel Cycling. We did what we did because we felt we had to for our community, and my boyfriend really spurred me on to do it.

It was only afterwards, when people saw what we'd done and talked to us about it, that we realised what it meant to them, to the community, to women. So often, women are told 'no' – especially minority women. Fuel Cycling is proof that you don't have to look a certain way to accomplish what you want. Certainly this year, International Women's Day felt very different for me, when I was up there on the bike and using our studio to prove that dreams can become reality.

*Above: Fuel's is a team of passionate women, but all genders are welcome*

**“A lot of studios showcase their instructors, but that can be intimidating for riders. At Fuel, it isn’t about what the instructor can do. It’s about what we can do together”**

***How are people responding to you?***

**MK:** I think post-COVID, people are very aware of who they’re supporting and where they’re spending their money. People come into our studio and they love the ride, but even more than that, they want us to be successful. They see the love our studio has been built on, and that we continue to pour into the community, and they want to support us.

**MG:** I think it’s also true that people see themselves represented at Fuel Cycling. Ours is a very diverse crowd: gender, colour of skin, ages, backgrounds. We have military wives. We have grandmothers. And although 70–80 per cent of our members are women, we have men. Intimidated at first by all the

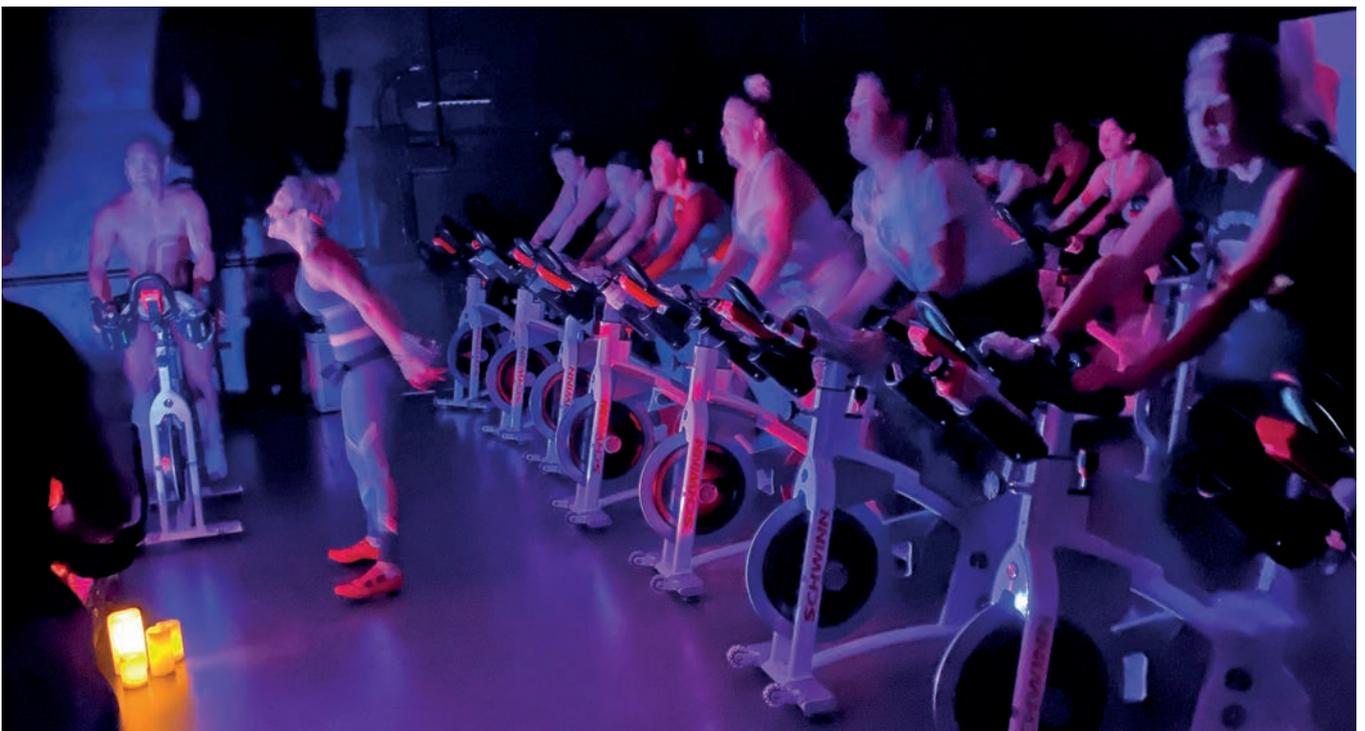
women, they quickly get hooked into the community and bring their friends too, so the number of male members is growing.

We very much represent the community. Everybody has a seat at Fuel Cycling.

***What are you most proud of?***

**MG:** We’re a community that’s built a studio and the feedback is incredible. People say it’s like *Cheers*, because everyone knows your name! They say you walk in a stranger and leave a friend. Hearing things like that, it makes me really proud of what we’ve created.

We haven’t done it the easy way, either. We’ve done it in a really meaningful way – a way that matters to us and our community. I think that’s really important. ▶



Above: Fuel Cycling currently runs around 15 classes a week, but plans to expand the timetable



► I'm also incredibly proud of the fact that, just 11 months after opening, we won Best Boutique Fitness Studio in the Best of Monterey 2022 awards. The names we were shortlisted alongside, I felt honoured even to be considered, but we won! It's meant such a lot to our whole community.

**MK:** What I'm most proud of is seeing how lives have been changed by being part of our Fuel Cycling community. I always get really emotional when I see people celebrating a milestone, making friends, doing something they've never done before – standing up in the pedals during a ride, for example, or coming to class in new gym-wear and feeling great about themselves. I always wonder, would that have happened for them without Fuel Cycling? I'm just so proud of what we've all created together.

**What are your plans moving forward?**

**MG:** We may introduce a couple of new cycling concepts over the coming months. We're fine-tuning what those might be, but ultimately it will be based on what our community is ready for.

**MK:** Beyond that, the sky's the limit. We've already grown our membership to 70 and our studio to 35 bikes, but we're just getting started.



Above left: Fuel Cycling has “everything you need, without the frills you don’t”

Above right: “We’re women-owned and minority-owned, and that matters,” say Fuel’s founders

Left: A Polaroid wall showcases the tight-knit Fuel community

Right: Instructors get off the bike and dance around, bringing fun to the room

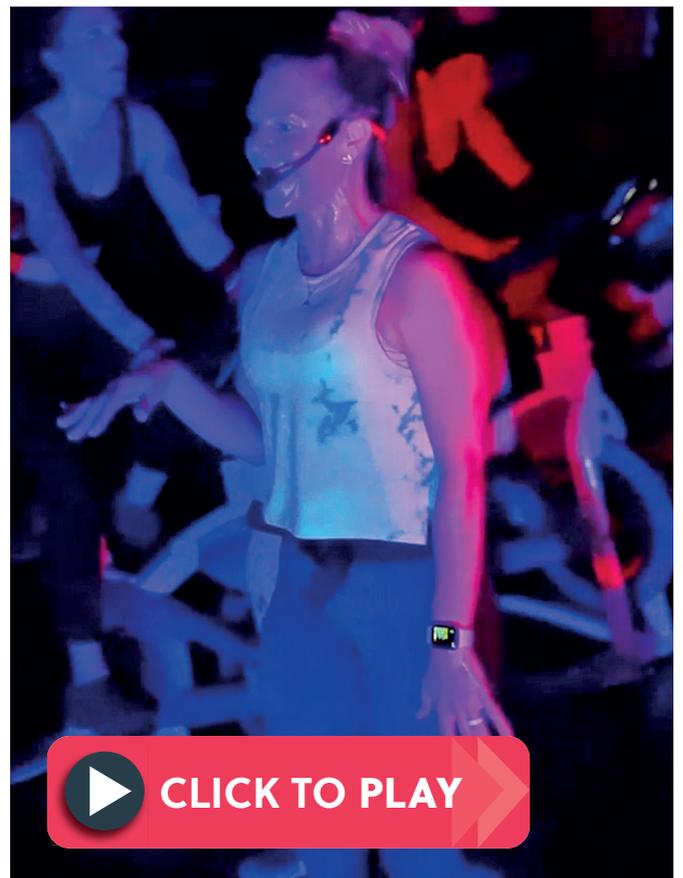


We currently offer around 15 classes a week and could easily add more, as well as bringing in new instructors. That's where we always look to spend our money – on top-quality staff – and we have plenty of space at our current site to grow.

Longer term, I have big dreams for Fuel Cycling. Five years from now, I'd love to be in larger premises where we have a second studio for complementary disciplines – yoga, stretching, barre and so on – as well as a juice bar. All our instructors are multi-disciplinary, so it's just the extra studio space we'd need.

Would we ever open more locations? I don't know – never say never. We could also go online again to make Fuel accessible to even more people. The most important thing, though, is that we built Fuel for this specific community. We will first build and grow here before we even consider going anywhere else. ●

 @fuel\_cycling



# Trending now

What's hot in the world of indoor cycling?  
*RIDE HIGH* shares its top 10 trends for 2023

*Holy Ride proves indoor cycling is still  
very much alive – when done well*

PHOTO: © CycleBar



Xponential's CycleBar now has more than 260 studios open, and new markets signed

# #1 RETAINING RELEVANCE

It's true that in the US, Mindbody recently reported a 39 per cent drop in cycling class attendance (Jan–July 2022 vs Jan–July 2021). Yet it's important to note that group cycling wasn't the only discipline to feel the pinch: yoga was also down 31 per cent, dance 14 per cent, CrossFit 9 per cent. Equally important to note that this is data for a market hit by Flywheel's demise and SoulCycle's multiple studio closures.

Meanwhile, other brands are doing well – even in the US. Barry's is moving ahead with the roll-out of its RIDE x LIFT concept, for example (see trend #7), while Xponential's CycleBar now has more than 260 studios open and agreements signed to move into Japan, Australia and New Zealand.

And indoor cycling remains the #1 group exercise format in markets like the Netherlands, where concepts such as Holy Ride have been inspired and shaped by customer demand.

So, the fall isn't universal. Indeed, as Peloton adjusts and restructures for a world in which consumers have a choice about where they exercise, it seems in-person is where it's at once again.

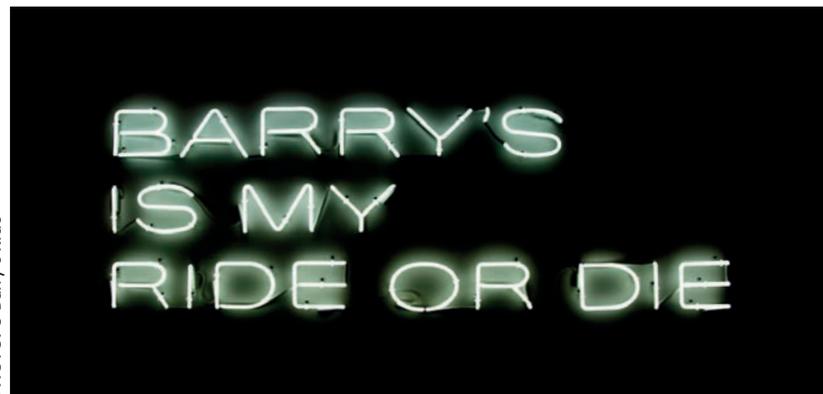
The key is this: indoor cycling is still very much alive when done well. Whatever their

model, fitness facilities must continue to innovate and experiment within their cycle offering to keep it relevant – a go-to workout – in an era in which Experience, with a capital E, is now the customer expectation.

Of course, there's only so much you can do on a static bike, so experience will lean into the environment, soundtrack, community and vibe you create as much as the programming (which, incidentally, still has scope for innovation – see trends #7 and #10).

As Holy Ride's Tom Moos told *RIDE HIGH* earlier this year: "Indoor cycling will become increasingly immersive and experiential. There are still a lot of dark boxes at the moment!" ▶

PHOTO: © Barry's Ride



Above: Barry's is progressing the roll-out of its cycle concept



PHOTO: © DROP FITNESS

## #2 BOUTIQUES BUDDY UP

Ever since the pandemic wreaked havoc on the fitness sector, many standalone – and especially single-discipline – boutiques have been finding it particularly hard-going.

“Even pre-COVID, businesses in our sector had struggled: there were record attendances at boutique studios, but head office costs made it hard to make money,” the founders of UK-based United Fitness Brands (UFB) told us when we interviewed them in May 2022. “We realised there was an opportunity to drive significant economies of scale by joining forces.”

It therefore comes as little surprise that more and more boutique brands are ‘buddying up’, coming under one roof at head office, in-club, or both.

UFB, for example, has now brought together four boutique operations, primarily at a head office level but also via a number of dual-brand locations in London. Its founders told *RIDE HIGH* they now hope to create multi-brand studios in smaller cities across the UK.

Elsewhere we’re seeing different takes on buddying up. In the Netherlands, Urban Gym



PHOTO: © URBAN GYM GROUP

Left: In the US, Drop Fitness has four boutique brands under one roof

Right: United Fitness Brands is driving economies of scale by bringing brands together

Below left: UGG has multiple brands under its umbrella, creating clusters within cities



“Ever since the pandemic, many standalone and single discipline boutiques have found it hard-going”

Group (UGG) has brought multiple fitness brands under its umbrella, including boutique brand HIGH STUDIOS. Offering strategic guidance, shared resources and a cluster approach to conquer target cities – notably Amsterdam – with its portfolio of brands, UGG has also grown the reach of HIGH STUDIOS by creating HIGH-branded group exercise studios inside its ClubSportive and Trainmore clubs.

Then there’s newcomer Drop Fitness (see our chat with founder Jeb Balise in our special

cost of living supplement: *A Global Crisis?*). Drop opened its inaugural site in New Jersey, US, in May 2022, bringing together four existing, third-party, best-in-class boutique brands alongside private training and a gym floor. All available on a ‘pay for what you want, when you want’ basis, Drop pays each boutique brand a revenue share.

“It’s a great way for boutique brands to grow and scale across the country, beyond the big cities where they traditionally operate,” says Balise. “For a boutique to come out to the suburbs on its own would cost so much time, energy and money, all for a 2,000sq ft space. Town planning permissions can sometimes be brutal, and doing it for a 25,000sq ft space is much more efficient.”

Expect to see more of this in 2023 as boutiques battle to weather not only the repercussions of the pandemic, but now also the energy crisis, spiralling inflation and expectations of salary increases. ▶

# #3 A SUSTAINABLE AGENDA



Above: BODY BIKE Smart+ OceanIX is the eco-warrior's bike, manufactured using plastic from recycled fishing nets

Right: Operators such as 1Rebel have been free from single-use plastic for a while now

Below right: Terra Hale markets itself as London's first eco-friendly fitness destination



PHOTO: © 1REBEL

Environmental sustainability has been on the agenda of most businesses for years now, and we've seen some moves in the right direction within the indoor cycling sector. Operators such as the UK's 1Rebel have been free from single-use plastic for a while now, for example, while Terra Hale markets itself as 'London's first eco-friendly fitness destination', generating electricity from its indoor cycling classes (see our special supplement: *A Global Crisis?*)

From a supplier perspective, BODY BIKE OceanIX is the eco-warrior's indoor bike – the first in the world to be manufactured using plastic from recycled fishing nets – and in 2021, BODY BIKE also launched a best-in-class eCargo bike. "It's a bit of a departure from our usual fitness sector territory, but we have the capacity in our factory and it just feels like the next 'right thing to do,'" said CEO Uffe A Olesen.

But as the energy crisis ramps up, gas and electricity prices threaten the very existence of our sector and the world accelerates towards a climate crisis, clubs can't view sustainability as a mere passion project. It has to be embedded at the heart of what we do – and as Terra Hale proves, bikes aren't just energy-efficient thanks to not needing power. They can also be energy generators. Now is the time to explore this potential. ▶

*"Bikes aren't just energy efficient thanks to not needing power. They can also be energy generators."*



PHOTO: © TERRA HALE

# #4 NO DIGITAL DIVIDE

Over recent years, hybrid models have been the hot topic of the fitness sector. Now the buzzword is 'omnichannel'.

"As the number of channels proliferates, equal importance must be given to digital and in-person," advised Paul Bowman, CEO of Wexer, in *RIDE HIGH* #16. "Every customer will use multiple touchpoints and expect to dive straight in to a familiar experience each time.

"The challenge for clubs is to deliver exactly the same user experience whatever the point of entry."

While we're seeing a growing number of third parties creating digital content for both in-club and at-home use, Bowman believes clubs' own star trainers are key to a consistent experience. It's why Wexer's ecosystem now allows clubs to stream self-produced content not only to at-home digital platforms, but also onto the big screen of in-club virtual studios.

"If you're looking for an advantage over the big digital players and the global fitness influencers, your team of local rockstars with their loyal member followings is it," Bowman advises. "Every club operator



Above: In Singapore, CruCycle creates digital content to support its at-home bike



PHOTO: © ABSOLUTE GROUP

*“Every club operator should maximise opportunities to put their own stars in front of their customers”*

should be maximising opportunities to put these stars in front of customers, both on-site and at-home. And that means creating digital content fronted by them.”

For a great example, look no further than Thailand’s trailblazing Absolute Group, which was quick off the mark in identifying the dual value of digital content for at-home as well as in-club, launching its Absolute X hybrid studio concept in 2022.

“With this second distribution channel, we’re very happy to continue investing in high-quality digital content,” confirms founder and CEO Ben Karoonkornsakul.

It can be an expensive undertaking, yet members will forgive lower production quality if they’re seeing their favourite instructors on-screen. Expect more branded digital experiences that cost-effectively maximise yield and usage of cycling studios, as well as supporting members at home.

*Above: Absolute X launched in 2022, using self-produced content on-screen*

*Below: Evolution Wellness has had huge success with its digital platform, and its own instructor-led content leads the way*

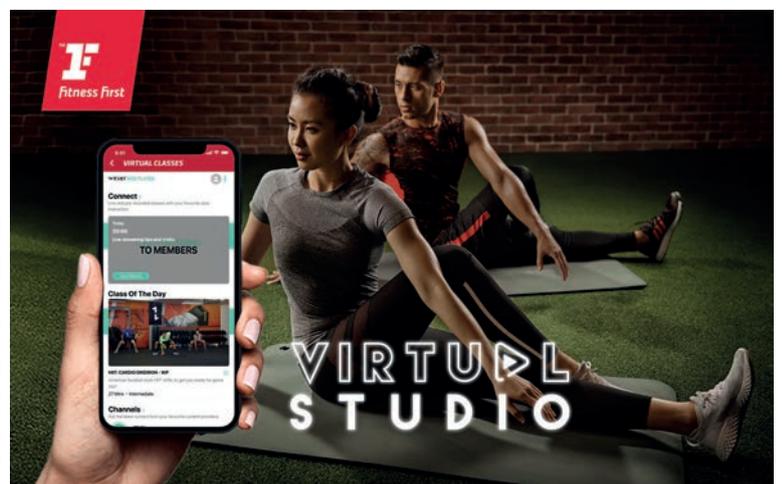


PHOTO: © EVOLUTION WELLNESS

# #5 A NEW REALITY

In summer 2022, *RIDE HIGH* spoke to Emma Barry – global fitness authority and renowned group exercise expert – and Les Mills legend Steven Renata about indoor cycling past, present and future.

In our chat, Barry was hugely enthusiastic about the digital innovations coming down the line for group cycling. Some of the topics she touched on might reasonably expect to be a trend in their own right, but in our top 10 we've pushed them all together into one digital innovations trend that hints at an exhilarating future for indoor cycling.

We're talking AR, VR, the metaverse. "Anything that brings digital enhancement into the real world for an extended, mixed reality – especially when it includes a social element of cycling together, remotely," says Barry.

"We've seen the rise and fall of Peloton and friends, but they've unquestionably given a huge nod to health and wellness along the way, driving up awareness of



PHOTO: © PELOTON

fitness and just how good the experience can be, as well as showing us all how 'sticky' an online community can be."

She continues: "Once they get the eyewear down, the bike is the perfect tool for AR and VR. We already wear sunglasses when we're riding outside, so once the headsets aren't so large and sweat-inducing, that's going to be very interesting. We'll literally be able to be in another world as we cycle.

"AR will be able to transpose all kinds of information and metrics to those motivated by data: personalised power output, position in the pack, headwind, lighting, direction cues and so on. VR will be able to emulate



*Left: Once the eyewear isn't so large, the bike will be the perfect tool for AR and VR, says Barry*

*Above: In 2016, BODY BIKE gave FIBO delegates a chance to try VR*

*Below left: Peloton showed us how 'sticky' an online community can be, and how good the experience*

*“AR will be able to transpose all kinds of information and metrics to those who are motivated by data”*

and enhance existing worlds, such as the great races around the globe: the Ironman World Championship in Kona, the Tour de France, the Red Bull UCI Pump Track World Champs. We'll be able to achieve unlimited participation and presumably get to sync data to achieve validated comparison.

“Weaving in and out of the metaverse – the meeting place of different realities – will become more seamless and enhanced over the next 20 years as we take our data and avatars with us across the various worlds to achieve our own unique goals.

“Finally, one really cool thing I saw at CES 2020 was Delta Airlines' unveiling

of Parallel Reality, designed to tailor a passenger's experience using biometrics. We're talking complete immersion in an opt-in, personalised experience – and it's now being trialled at Detroit airport.

“Essentially, multiple passengers can look at the same screen but only see their own unique travel data: their flight information and directions to the gate, weather at their final destination, directions to a Sky Club – all in the language of the passenger's choice.

“It's not too much of a stretch to see how the fitness data we already cast to screens – heart rate, for example – could be expanded on and personalised in an equally meaningful way.” ▶



PHOTO: © SHUTTERSTOCK/MONTE\_A

## #6 SELF-DETERMINATION

While it's true that not everyone wants to focus on metrics in their workouts – it's why rhythm cycling has become so popular the world over – nevertheless there are many fitness fans around the world who like to keep track of their progress. And of course, whether you're an app developer or club operator, this data can be gold dust; used well, it is the source of unparalleled behavioural insights and the basis of a personalised experience.

Yet the question remains: who owns this data? And increasingly the answer is: the individual. If you buy into that – and at *RIDE HIGH*, we do – then our role as fitness providers must be to help people make sense of their data, giving them the insights and understanding they need to plot their next steps, without overstepping the privacy mark.

This will be a challenge as exercisers increasingly mix and match workout locations and platforms; it will first require a willingness to openly share data across platforms, so the individual can opt into and be presented with one cohesive picture of their efforts.

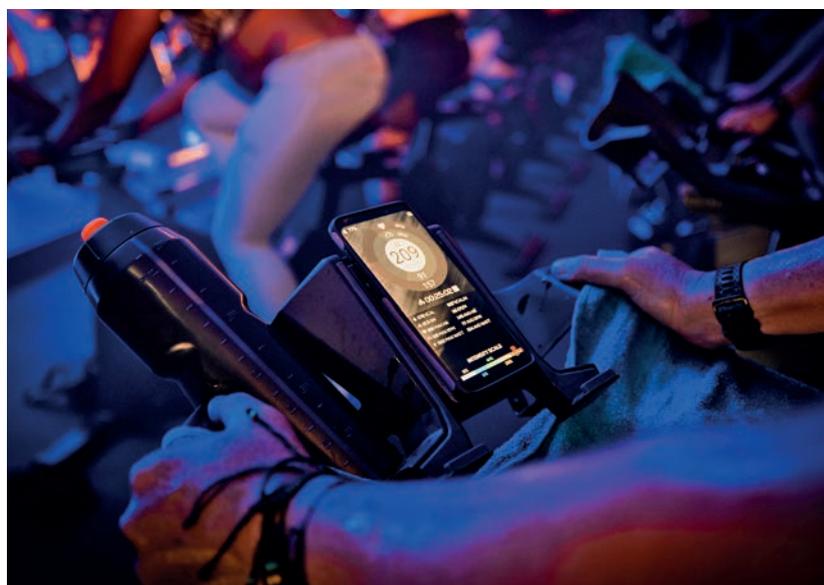
This is why BODY BIKE has already done away with consoles, instead allowing exercisers to download its app and use their own mobile phone as their console. They then immediately take their data away with them

at the end of each workout. It's also why the BODY BIKE Strava club was created, allowing exercisers to upload their BODY BIKE indoor cycling workouts into their Strava account. They can then share workout data with fellow enthusiasts and access a full record of all their cycling sessions in one place.

We need more of this moving forward, putting members and their progress first by making data sharing easier – especially if we are to avoid tech fatigue as digital solutions continue to proliferate and it becomes harder and harder to access one clear picture.

*Above: We need to help exercisers see all their workout data in one place*

*Below: Your phone becomes your console on BODY BIKE*



# #7 FUSION WORKOUTS



PHOTO: © EVOLUTION WELLNESS

Above: FIRE Fitness offers classes that fuse indoor cycling and yoga

We've reported previously on the growth of fusion cycling classes and now, in 2023, this trend looks set to go up another gear, with the likes of Barry's rolling out RIDE x LIFT.

The class follows Barry's tried-and-tested formula, whereby members alternate between cardio and strength-based programming. In this case, however, the bike replaces the treadmill of the brand's signature bootcamp class, making for a more accessible and lower-impact workout.

Why is this trend so interesting? Because it ticks so many boxes: a chance for operators to create something unique for their clubs – a signature, branded experience – and for members to take part in a 'bang for their buck' workout that keeps them engaged, gives them a great all-round workout and offers high perceived value for money.

As clubs continue to innovate to keep their cycling workouts fresh, fusion classes will become an increasingly popular tool.



PHOTO: © BARRY'S RIDE

Barry's piloted RIDE pre-COVID and is now rolling it out as RIDE x LIFT



PHOTO: © LES MILLS

## #8 AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The future of indoor cycling will, we hope, see instructor education become more specialised.

*RIDE HIGH* recently spoke to Angela Reed-Fox of the Indoor Cycling Institute, who told us: “Many instructors just want to excel at indoor cycling: the discipline is heading into its own space and that’s entirely right.

“I believe it’s outdated to expect instructors to also have a certificate in gym instructing, PT or exercise to music. Cycling shouldn’t be CPD on top of one of those qualifications. Rather, there should be regularly updated, indoor cycling CPD on top of a dedicated, entry-level indoor cycling certificate.”

Hear absolutely hear. For an excellent discussion on how indoor cycling education and qualifications need to evolve to give us the instructor workforce we need for the future, check out our recent panel discussion [here](#).

*Above: There should be specialist qualifications for indoor cycling instructors, says Angela Reed-Fox*

*“Many instructors just want to excel at indoor cycling: the discipline is heading into its own space and that’s entirely right. It shouldn’t be CPD on top of other qualifications”*

# #9 RECOVERY-PLUS

**R**ecovery is one of the buzzwords in the fitness sector right now; *RIDE HIGH* has already reported on how this is impacting programming in the indoor cycling arena.

But what about instructors? For a long time almost disregarded in this respect – expected to simply keep going, churning out class after class after class with little rest – attention is finally turning to helping indoor cycling instructors avoid downtime through illness and injury, and ultimately extend their careers.

In the UK, Susie Millen's My Vocal Fitness focuses on preserving instructor voices. *RIDE HIGH* stalwart Noël Nocchiolo does similar in the US under the banner of PEP for FitPros.

"As fitness professionals, we learn about almost every muscle in the body," says Millen. "Rarely, though, are we taught how to use our voice or a microphone effectively. The result: instructors across the planet aren't vocally ready to teach the volume of classes they're timetabled to deliver each week. Their voices become unreliable, deteriorating, even lost."

Meanwhile, power training expert Hunter Allen recently offered *RIDE HIGH* some incredible insights into the physiological strain placed on cycling instructors' bodies, in a fascinating feature on the Training Stress Score.

"After six weeks of instructing two cycling classes a day, an instructor's chronic training load could be 160 – the same as a pro cyclist at the end of the Tour de France," he explained. Little wonder, then, that injury and illness are so common among frequently timetabled cycle studio stars.

Our view: when it comes to our workforce, it shouldn't just be about recovery. We need to see a much greater focus on prevention of injury and strain, bringing longevity to instructors' careers in a healthy and sustainable way.



PHOTO: © ØRBIKE



All photos above: Whether physically or vocally, indoor cycling instructors need to understand how they can better look after themselves to drive longevity in their careers



## #10 A BROADER CHURCH

Over the last couple of years, we've seen fitness newcomers finally turning to our sector, their newfound appreciation of our value born from the pandemic. In turn, a more diverse global member base is gathering – one that spans a broad range of fitness levels, experiences and expectations.

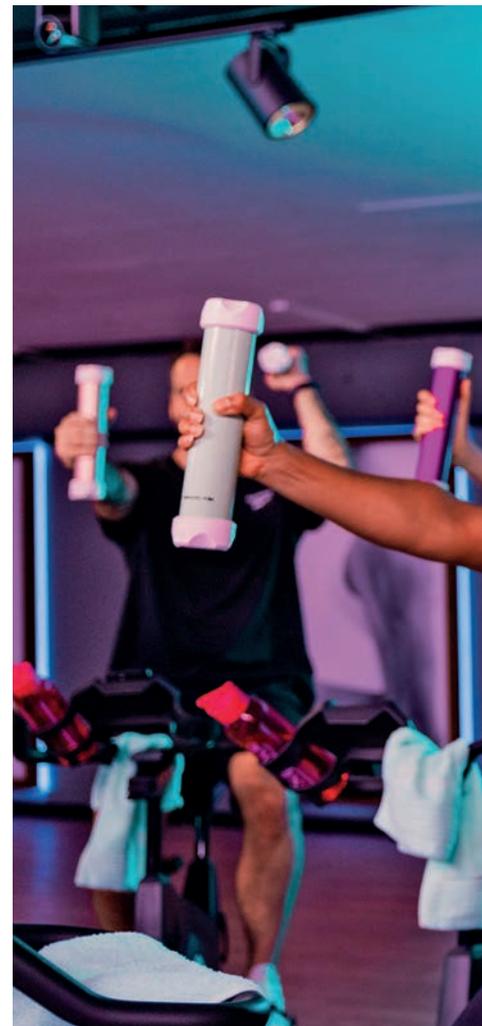
On the one hand, says global fitness authority Emma Barry, there are now more people enjoying 'The Sport of Fitness' – being fit for fit's sake and finding a favourite exercise genre, rather than training to be fit for a sport.

Yet at the same time, we're also in an era when – still jaded by the pandemic – many are exercising for reasons that are as much mental, emotional and even spiritual as they are physical. "People are looking for entertainment, they're looking for release, and most of all, at this time in history, they're looking for joy and hope," confirms Barry.

This diversity in the member base holds an important lesson for indoor cycling instructors and providers, as Tash Marshall Bean explained in a recent interview with *RIDE HIGH*: "With the pandemic bringing a wave of new people into fitness, it's more important than ever that we take classes back to basics.

*Above: The pandemic has brought a wider audience to exercise, with diverse needs*

*Right: New SclptCycle is "unashamedly" making women its primary audience*



"I'm currently seeing far too many instructors making the choreography too complicated for their riders and leaving people behind. Every single participant must feel successful, and instructors must (re)learn how to integrate new riders with well-versed riders to achieve this."

Even better, said Louise Ager in the same panel discussion, would be a return to "diversity in class styles to support a broader audience in indoor cycling".

She added: "The more generic the experience, the less likely you are to really engage someone. We need targeted classes that have a purpose and an intentional audience: classes for beginners, for overweight people, for seniors, for endurance enthusiasts, for those short of time, for fans of different music genres."

*"The more generic the experience, the less likely you are to really engage someone. We need targeted classes."*

This conscious targeting is exactly what House of Workouts has done with the launch of its new ScptCycle programme (see page 42 of this issue).

One thing is for sure: moving forward the indoor cycling sector must work to ensure its product delivers strongly to an increasingly diverse audience. ●





*Above: General manager Mariia Brezytska has worked at the club for 13 years*

# *Selling normality* IN UKRAINE

In the Ukrainian city of Odessa, Formula Wellness & Spa has re-opened its doors to offer members and employees a sense of normality in the face of the ongoing war. General manager Mariia Brezytska speaks to Kate Cracknell.

## *Tell us about your club*

Formula Wellness & Spa is a large and beautiful club right in the heart of Odessa. It's a very interesting building architecturally, as it was a theatre until it opened as a health club and spa in March 2006. It was also the first club of its kind in Odessa, with such a wide range of facilities all under one roof, spread over three floors and around 4,500sq m.

We have a 25m swimming pool, a gym and over 30 types of group exercise class, from HIIT to indoor cycling, dance to pilates, TRX to aqua classes. There are also dedicated yoga and CrossFit studios, two squash courts and a fitness café. Alongside this is a separate spa zone with a Turkish steamroom, Finnish sauna and a salt room, as well as spa treatments including medical treatments conducted by doctors.

Our members typically live, work or go to school nearby and it's a very family-orientated club: the average age of our members is around 45 years, as parents come with their children of various ages, many of whom go on to become adult members themselves. Membership, including access to all facilities, costs €1,000 a year.

## *How popular is indoor cycling?*

Indoor cycling is fairly new at our club – we only introduced it about two years ago – but it's my favourite group exercise class because the results are amazing.

Indoor cycling isn't a big thing yet in Ukraine and it's quite unusual for clubs in Odessa to offer it; there are only one or two that do. Even in Kyiv, only a few clubs offer indoor cycling classes. ▶

**“Indoor cycling isn't a big thing yet in Ukraine, but it's working well for us. Before the war, our cycling classes were waitlisted”**



► It's working really well for us, though. At first, our members were unsure about it: they worried it would be too hard a workout. But then a few people tried it and enjoyed it and the word spread. Before the war, it had got to the point that our cycling classes were waitlisted. We were really proud of that.

### ***How has the war impacted your club?***

The war has brought a lot of changes. When it started, we had to close our club for three months and stop all our activities. It was only at the beginning of June that we decided to slowly start back up again, with our swimming pool and spa centre only re-opening in October. We're still offering less group exercise at the moment: around 25 per cent of our usual class schedule.

In terms of our membership, before the war we had 1,500 members and we welcomed around 450 people a day. Now we have 1,000 members and maximum 200 visits a day.

Of those 1,000 members, around 70 per cent were our members before the war. The other 30 per cent have either moved over from other local clubs – Odessa might be safer than other parts of the country, but it isn't 100 per cent safe and many clubs are

still closed – or else they're people who have relocated to Odessa from hotspots of the war, moving to our city for its relative safety.

What we are seeing, though, is that people aren't committing to annual memberships any more, or even six-month memberships. They're buying a month, maybe three months at a time – sometimes even just two weeks.

### ***How close to the fighting are you?***

Odessa hasn't been one of the war's main hotspots so far, but some of our members and team members have gone to the front to fight. It's impossible to contact them or know where or how they are, but we're incredibly proud of them and hope they will return safely so we can thank them for their bravery.

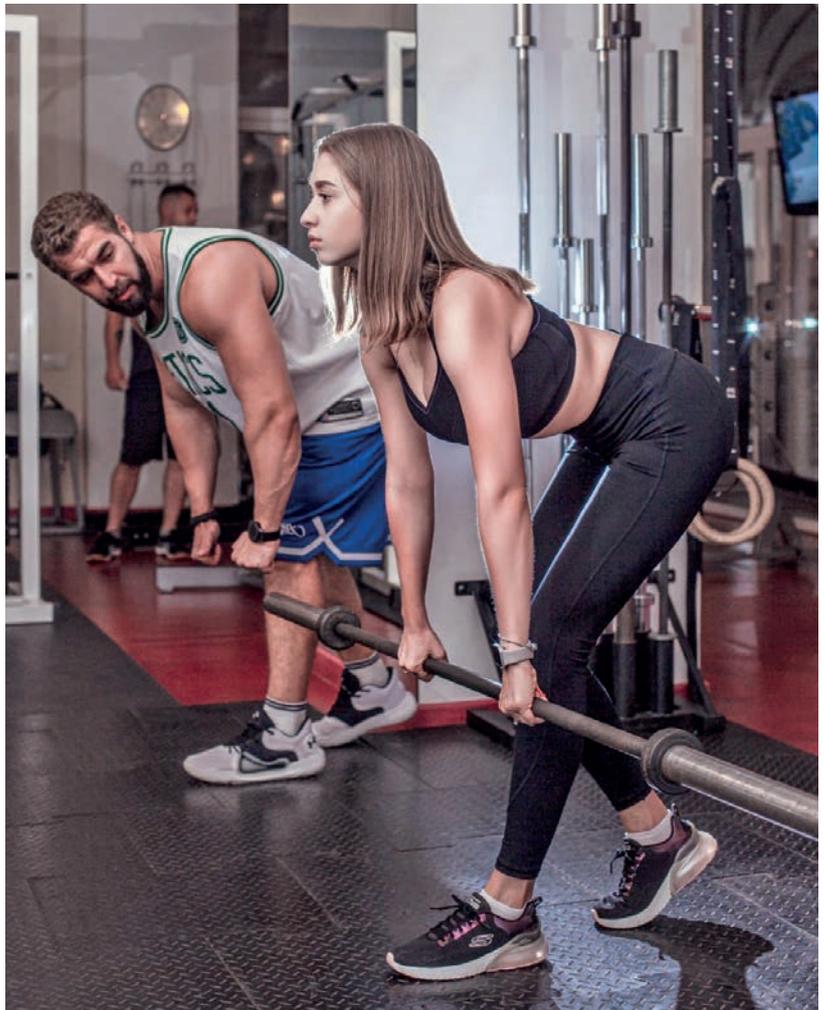
There have been times when the war has come very close, though. On 23 July, rockets attacked the sea port right in the centre of Odessa. It was like a horror film. There were fortunately no victims, but children were crying, people were running everywhere, our team members couldn't remember what to do – where to take our members to ensure they were safe – even though we'd built a shelter on the ground floor of the club



*Above left: The club currently receives a maximum of 200 visits a day*

*Above middle: The spa centre and the pool only re-opened in October 2022*

*Above right: Formula was the first club in Ukraine to offer so much under one roof*



**“People aren’t committing to annual memberships any more. They’re buying a month or three months at a time – sometimes just two weeks”**

before we re-opened. It was the first time any of us had experienced anything like this and people panicked. It was an important lesson in embedding our safety procedures.

Now, I actually feel safer at work than I do at home – ours is a big, strong building with a shelter, which I don’t have at home – but as we speak, the last few days have still been horrible, as our city has been under constant drone attack.

Even now, I find it so hard to believe all this is really happening. I feel like I’m watching a movie, or else I wake up in the morning and feel like it must all have been a bad dream.

**Why re-open Formula so soon?**

Choosing to start things back up again was the hardest thing we’ve done, and we thought about it for a long time before we actually did it. We didn’t know how many of our members were left in Odessa, because when the war came, many of those who

**“No matter what happens now, I will stay here with my team. This is my country and I don’t want to be anywhere else.”**

*Right: Formula is a family-focused club, with parents bringing children of all ages*

*Below right: Formula Wellness & Spa occupies an interesting building in the heart of Odessa that used to be a theatre*



► had a chance to move out of Ukraine did so. We also didn’t know how willing people would be to spend their money on fitness.

So, we didn’t know if we’d have enough money to pay our team’s salaries or our utility bills. Choosing to re-open could have been more damaging to our brand and our business than staying closed until things were more stable.

We also have a smaller team now as some people have moved away – as indeed I did for a while. I’m a single mother with two children and I was afraid, so initially I moved to Moldova to escape the war. However, I came back when we decided to re-open the club. No matter what happens now, I will



stay here with my team. This is my country and I don't want to be anywhere else.

And honestly, our team has been fantastic. The most positive thing to come out of all this was their response when we told them we were going to re-open. We asked who was ready to work and everyone who was still in Odessa said yes.

Additionally, not one of them asked about salary. They just wanted to know the schedule and how they could help get Formula up and running again. They've been so dedicated and have worked so hard to make re-opening possible. Everyone tells me they've really missed having a routine, going to work and speaking to colleagues

and members. People are working for the pleasure of feeling normal again.

Our members also tell us they're so glad we're open. People need to do something with their stress at the moment, and fitness and sport are the best possible things for this.

### ***Will the war change things forever?***

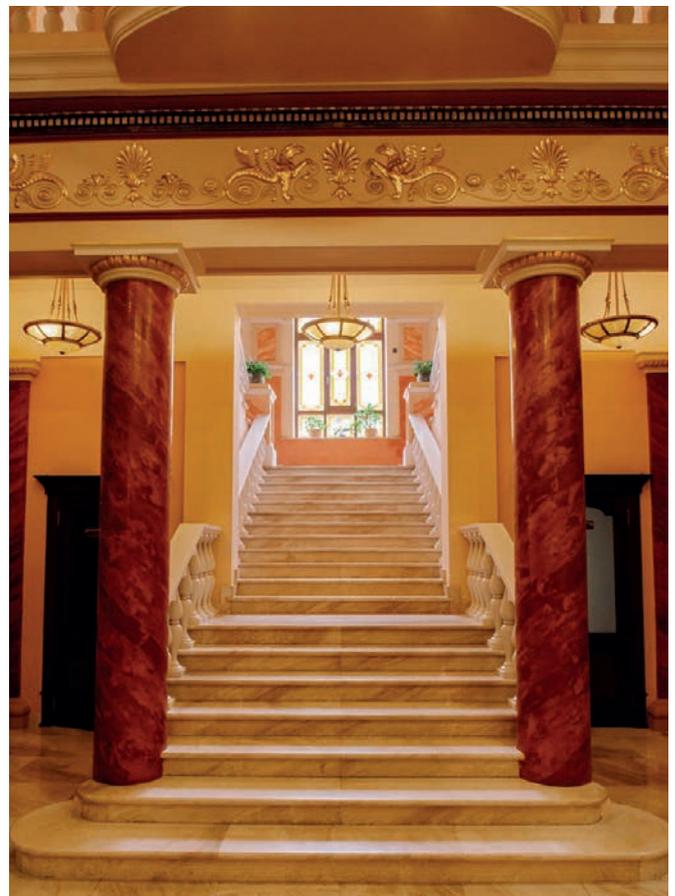
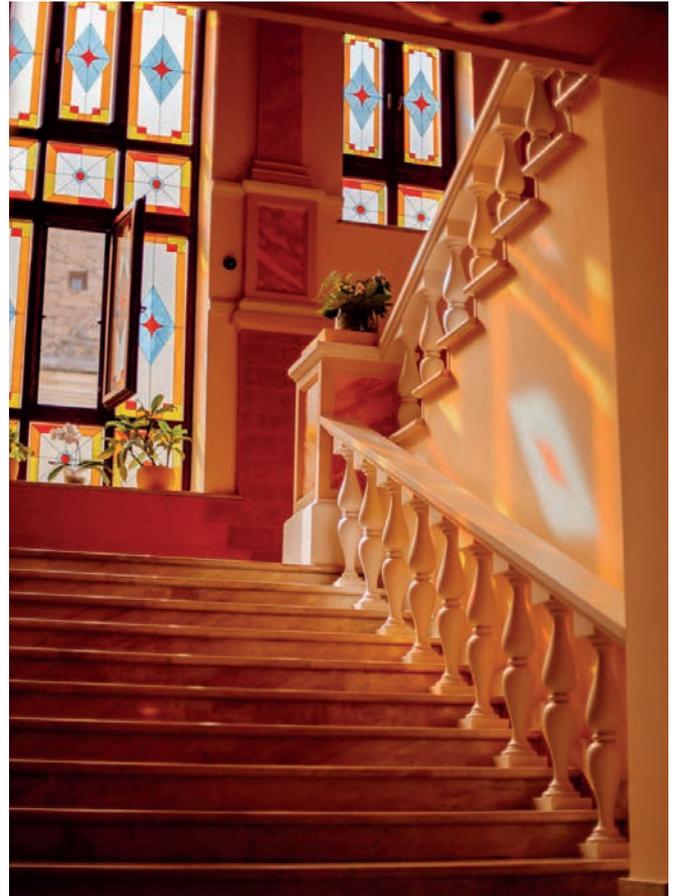
I've been at Formula for 13 years now and I can confidently say our club won't change as a result of the war. We're confident the business will come back. People need to do familiar things. They need to deal with stress. Our members tell us they've missed their fitness and spa treatments. They've missed being able to look after themselves. ▶

**“Everyone tells me they’ve really missed having a routine. People are working for the pleasure of feeling normal again.”**



*Left: Indoor cycling isn't commonly offered in Ukraine, but Formula's classes have been popular since they launched*

*Top and bottom right: Formula is a big, strong building with a bomb shelter on the ground floor. "I feel safer at work than I do at home," says Brezytska*



- ▶ So for now, we'll work to build the club back up again, getting memberships and revenues back to how they were before the war. And then, in the second half of 2023, we'll look to do all the work we had planned for 2022.

Because we had big plans, including building a new reformer pilates studio and launching new spa treatments for face and body. That's all on hold while the unbelievable horror of the war continues, but it is just a pause. We'll get back to our plans in 2023.

### ***What are your hopes for the future?***

I always try to think positively, so I look forward to a future – just a couple of years from now – when all our cities have been rebuilt and restored to their former glory. I hope it will be a new era for our country, when Ukrainians return home and we welcome tourists and share our experiences with them.

In the meantime, I simply wish for a peaceful country where I don't have to worry for my children every time they go to school. My hope and belief is that before the end of 2023, we will have peace. ●

*Information correct at the time of publishing*

 /formula.wellness/

 @formula\_wellness

*ScptCycle's primary audience is women – and especially younger women – to bring a new generation to indoor cycling*





# REINVENTING indoor cycling

How can we attract new audiences to indoor cycling, broadening its appeal and boosting the usage of cycling studios? A new programme, ScIptCycle, has been created with this exact goal in mind. We get the low-down.

# THE CREATOR

## Renata Jarz CEO, House of Workouts

**“W**hen Spinning started around 25 years ago, it was hugely popular and studios were packed,” says Renata Jarz, CEO of group exercise programming specialist House of Workouts. “But as the years have gone by it’s become skewed towards men, at least in mainstream clubs. It’s the same guys you see out on the roads, focusing on performance and metrics. It’s become a badge of honour to go as hard as possible in class.

“As the emphasis has moved in this direction, we’re seeing fewer new people coming in to the discipline. The boutiques are an exception – they’re doing well at attracting Gen Zs – but elsewhere, indoor cycling has become a love-or-hate class with the same regulars all the time. And those regulars are getting older. Younger people just aren’t gravitating towards it.

“If we want indoor cycling to thrive across the whole sector in the future, we have to do something to attract younger riders now. We need a new approach.”

### User-centric programming

This realisation led Jarz and her team to create a new programme – ScptCycle – that she describes as “a body-shaping programme that happens to be on a bike”.

She explains: “Whenever we create a new programme, our research always begins with the end user. And what we’re seeing quite clearly – both in the different cycling classes we’ve sampled and from member research at my own club – is that people don’t necessarily want to push themselves too hard.

“Younger women in particular... they want to do something, but the idea of a really tough workout stops them going to the gym



*Renata Jarz wants to see indoor cycling studios packed again*

at all. They want to move, but they also want to feel comfortable and have fun. They want to do things because they enjoy them, not because they feel they have to. For them, something really is better than nothing.

“They also want to feel successful from the word go. All the complex choreography we see in cycling classes... it doesn’t always work for people. It’s great for some markets – places like Amsterdam, for example – but not so good elsewhere. I call it ‘catwalk programming’. It’s up there as the exciting new concept, but it isn’t instantly ‘wearable’ outside of the big cities.

“I think that’s one of the big mistakes our sector makes: we lose sight of the consumer. People who love fitness design programmes for other people who love fitness, forgetting that this audience is relatively small.

She continues: “For ScptCycle, we took the essence of the catwalk programming – the fun, the dancing on bikes, the great music – and we modified it. We made it more accessible. We created an easy-to-follow class that’s about entertainment, fun, moving on your own terms and releasing stress, with a festival vibe courtesy of a great soundtrack. ▶



*Above: ScptCycle uses special tubular weights where the contents move around, to train the core as well as the arms*

*Left: Younger women want to feel comfortable and have fun, doing things because they enjoy them, says Jarz*



**“If we want indoor cycling to thrive in the future, we have to do something to attract younger riders now”**



► “We also made it a full-body workout by adding special tubular hand weights that you use while seated on the bike – but importantly, not while you’re pedalling. The grit inside the tubes shifts from side to side so it really works your core, not just your arms. They were designed for us by a Dutch physiotherapist and they’re great: we already use them in other House of Workouts programmes.”

### A targeted audience

SciptCycle soft-launched at Saints & Stars in early September and has since been introduced at a number of clubs in the Netherlands. And the new programme is getting a lot of great feedback, says Jarz: “Younger girls and women love it. It isn’t just for women, of course – we’ve recently done a brilliant session at Nike HQ in the Netherlands, where men as well as women loved it. But we are unashamedly making women our primary audience,

with branding and marketing that’s quite feminine. We’re deliberately marketing in a way that sets the right expectations, so we’re less likely to attract – and potentially then disappoint – hardcore Spinners.”

She adds: “Honestly, our sector needs to be a lot more diverse in its cycle programming. In all other group exercise disciplines, you’ll find more targeted classes. But in cycling, there still seems to be a belief that one class can fit all. It can’t. It shouldn’t even try. Not every class has to be for everyone.”

Quarterly releases of SciptCycle will encompass programming and music. “Instructor standards have sadly dropped over the last 10 years, as everyone now expects to be qualified in just a couple of days,” says Jarz. “Pre-choreographed programming helps ensure a consistent class experience.”

Alongside these quarterly releases, which all SciptCycle licence holders will receive automatically, House of Workouts will also sell special, limited edition classes via its app.

*Above: SciptCycle’s launch party took place at Holy Ride in Amsterdam*

**“We're very clear in our guidance to clubs: don't launch ScpltCycle with your regular Spin or Sprint instructors in the saddle.”**



### **A new breed of instructor**

Speaking of instructors, says Jarz, the secret of ScpltCycle's success will be very careful recruitment. "It doesn't matter how great a programme is," she explains. "If you market it wrong and use the wrong trainers, it won't be successful. "If you market it wrong and use the wrong trainers, it won't be successful."

"If we want to attract our intended audience to ScpltCycle, hardcore has to go out the window. The whole thing has to be presented right."

With this in mind, two-day, in-person instructor training workshops focus on fun and participant happiness rather than data. "We turn instructors into entertainers, teaching them to deliver our classes with a wink and a smile," says Jarz. "Some people get it quicker than others, but we have tools up our sleeve to help people understand this is a new approach to cycling and they should leave all their preconceptions behind."

"We're also very clear in our guidance to clubs: don't launch ScpltCycle with your

regular Spin or Sprint instructors in the saddle. They will be too set in their ways. Bring in and train different types of people to coach this new class; you can always introduce your existing cycle instructors later, once they've experienced ScpltCycle and are open to this new way of teaching."

### **Growth plans**

ScpltCycle will be live in around 50 clubs in the Netherlands and Belgium by 1 January 2023, with BasicFit also set to introduce the class to its cycle studios in January.

"In the longer term – maybe six months to a year – we may make ScpltCycle class content available digitally too, but for now it will only be available as a live class," says Jarz. "That contact with the instructor, that social aspect... particularly for a programme like ScpltCycle, that's so important."

 @houseofworkouts

*Above: ScpltCycle is a full-body workout that just happens to take place on a bike*

**“Compared to five years ago, we’re seeing indoor cycling lose ground to other types of class. I want more for our SuperCycle studios!”**



*SuperCycle is SportCity's cycle studio brand, where the timetable already includes ScptCycle*

# THE EARLY ADOPTER

*Debbie Koekkoek*  
*GX manager, SportCity*



*Debbie Koekkoek was immediately a fan of ScIpCycle*



PHOTO: © JeroenZondag\_CM

**"W**e see ScIpCycle as a great fit for our SportCity brand," says Debbie Koekkoek, group exercise manager for the Netherlands-based chain of 113 health clubs.

"We're an all-inclusive operation in the value segment and we want to make sports and fitness accessible and enjoyable to all.

"Live group exercise is an important part of what we do, and that includes our fantastic SuperCycle studios – our indoor cycling brand – where we offer freecycle classes and Les Mills RPM across the board. Some clubs also offer Les Mills Sprint.

"Compared to five years ago, though, we're seeing indoor cycling lose ground to other types of class – mind-body, for example, which is booming across our estate. Then you look at how well the indoor cycling boutiques are doing, filling their classes throughout the day. I want more for our SuperCycle studios!

"There's definitely a male bias among our indoor cycling regulars at the moment, so we wanted to find something that could attract a new audience, getting more women into the studio. We're proud to ▶



**“I’m not normally an indoor cycling fan, but this is different. You almost forget it’s a cycling class!”**

*Left: Introducing weighted tubes to the cycling studio is 'brilliant', says Koekoek*

*Top right: SportCity operates a chain of 113 all-inclusive clubs across the Netherlands*

*Bottom right: SportCity is keen to attract more women into its cycling studios*

► be the first sports club chain to introduce ScpltCycle to the Dutch fitness market.”

### A true fusion class

Koekoek continues: “I’d been searching for something new to introduce to our SuperCycle studios and I heard about a new programme: ScpltCycle. I went to a trial class at House of Workouts and was immediately very enthusiastic about it.

“I’m not normally an indoor cycling fan, but this is different. You almost forget it’s a cycling class! Our other cycling classes are all about cardio. ScpltCycle is a total body workout. It’s a total experience.

“Having done boutique cycle classes where you use light weights while pedalling, I was surprised when in ScpltCycle we suddenly turned up the resistance as high as possible – so we couldn’t pedal – and picked up the resistance training tubes. I know these tubes from the BRN classes we already offer at our clubs – another House of Workouts programme – and they give your upper body and core a seriously good workout. I think it’s brilliant to introduce them into the cycling studio. It ensures ScpltCycle is a true fusion class, not just about the bike.

“And that’s why I love it, and why I believe it could be just what we’ve been looking for:

the concept that brings more people, and especially women, into our cycling studios.”

### Time to think different

“By the end of 2022, ScpltCycle will be available in multiple SportCity locations,” says Koekoek. “Classes will be led by SportCity instructors who haven’t previously been indoor cycling instructors. They currently teach classes such as BRN or BodyShape and they’re all enthusiastic about teaching ScpltCycle. I truly believe their regulars will follow them into the cycling studio.

“Because the way we’re talking about ScpltCycle, it will appeal to a new audience: it’s a party on a bike, a full-body workout, a calorie-burner. It’s a class where you use the bike as just one of the tools to achieve a fantastic full-body workout that’s also great fun, with great music and great lighting.

“If it turns out our regular cyclists also love the class, with its 45-minute format complementing the 60- and 30-minute classes already on our timetable, that’s a positive outcome too. But it is something a bit different and I fully expect it to bring new people to group cycling.”







## THE PARTNER

*Uffe A Olesen – CEO, BODY BIKE International*

**"B**ODY BIKE is thrilled to be selected by House of Workouts as the preferred bike for its fantastic new ScptCycle programme," says BODY BIKE CEO Uffe A Olesen.

"As soon as we met with Renata and her team at House of Workouts, we knew this was something we wanted to be part of. Their passion is so infectious. The way they see things so fresh and exciting. Their desire to do things differently so creative and inspiring.

"And over-arching all of this is a wonderful, overwhelming sense of fun in everything they do, including this vibrant, positive, life-affirming new indoor cycling programme. It feels like no coincidence that ScptCycle has come out of party-loving Holland! Who wouldn't want to be part of this?"

He adds: "With so much stress and negativity in all of our lives right now, ScptCycle is a programme the world really, really needs. It isn't about stats. It isn't about pressure to perform. It isn't about comparing yourself to others in the room. It's about happiness, escapism and fun.

"I believe it has all the ingredients to be the next global fitness phenomenon."

### **Working in synergy**

Olesen continues: "Beyond the ScptCycle programme, there are also lovely synergies between BODY BIKE and House of Workouts that make our partnership very natural.

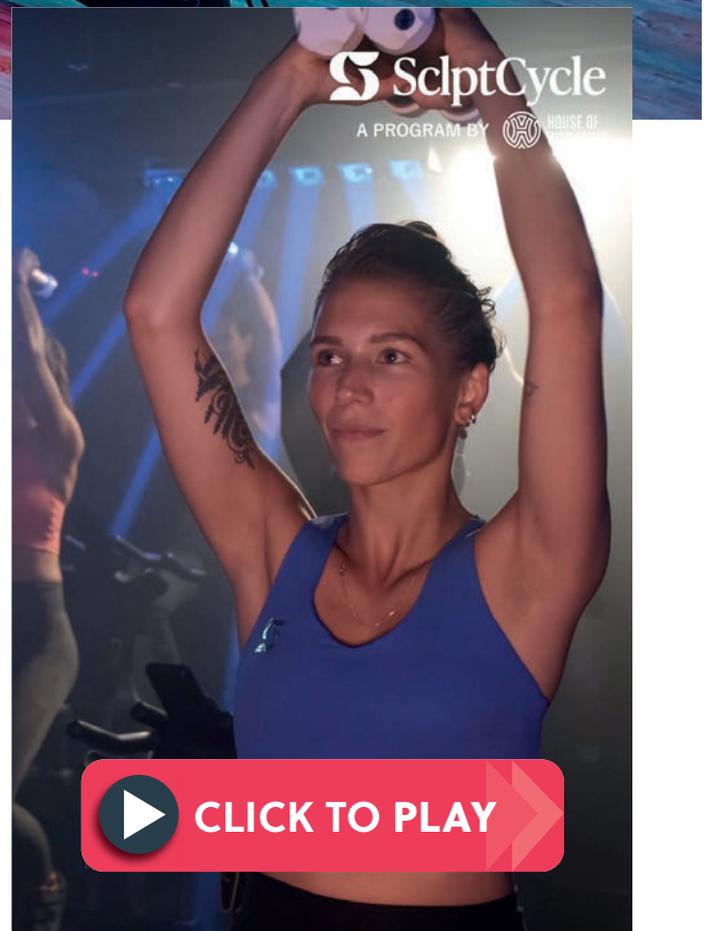
"Both of us are based in Europe, where we build things that last; our shared passion for indoor cycling is matched only by our mutual determination to achieve the highest possible quality in everything we do. ▶



*Above: BODY BIKE has been selected by House of Workouts to be the preferred bike for its ScpltCycle programme*

*Right: Immerse yourself in the fun of ScpltCycle with this launch event video*

**“There’s an overwhelming sense of fun in this vibrant, positive, life-affirming new programme”**



**“It feels like no coincidence that SclytCycle has come out of party-loving Holland! Who wouldn’t want to be part of this?”**



*"I believe SclytCycle has all the ingredients to be the next global fitness phenomenon," says BODY BIKE's Uffe A Olesen*

*Right (all images): BODY BIKE offers all sorts of options to incorporate branding, imagery and colours to create a studio with a real wow factor*



- ▶ “Renata wanted a bike that would provide an exceptional ride class after class, year after year. BODY BIKE delivers on that. “Our companies both have strong environmental and social agendas too, including a focus on diversity and inclusion in the workplace: we both employ people with disabilities in our manufacturing processes. Meanwhile, BODY BIKE Smart+ OceanIX is built using plastic from recycled fishing nets – we’re working on other sustainable products as we speak – and House of Workouts’ weighted tube, the other piece of equipment used in ScIptCycle, is manufactured using recycled aluminium. The plastic will soon be recycled too.



“Those tubes are available in all sorts of colours and can be branded or have slogans put on them – yet another opportunity to have fun when delivering ScIptCycle in your club. Meanwhile, BODY BIKE’s covers are available in 10 colours and can accommodate all sorts of branding and imagery to create a studio with a real wow factor.



“Together, BODY BIKE and House of Workouts want to bring new life to cycling studios by making indoor cycling fun again – through the programming, the environment, the marketing, the instruction, and of course the ride.”

BODY BIKE and House of Workouts will be together at FIBO 2023, offering a chance to see ScIptCycle in action. “Make a date for 13–16 April, Exhibition Centre Cologne, to visit a very special stand indeed,” says Olesen. “Hall 6, stand A13... Meet us in the woods!” ●



 @bodybikeinternational

*Kim Guhle is the creator of cycling4cancer and wears his mission with pride*



*“The event is an overwhelmingly upbeat one, filled with positive vibes and happy memories of those we may have lost”*

# cycling4cancer

Every year, Denmark’s televised fundraiser – *Knæk Cancer* – raises funds for cancer research.

And every year since 2014, cycling4cancer’s 24-hour event has been part of it, raising almost €1.5m to date. Creator and organiser Kim Guhle speaks to RIDE HIGH.

I lost my mum to cancer in 2000, but the idea of cycling4cancer first came about in 2013 when a friend of mine – TV sports journalist Morten Ankerdal – approached me about a fundraiser when his dad had cancer. I was an indoor cycling instructor then, but Morten thought he could beat me on the bike. We organised a three-hour indoor cycling event and I beat him big time!

As the loser, his challenge was to raise lots of money for cancer research, which he did along with his co-hosts of *Knæk Cancer* – a massive televised event in Denmark which raises money for cancer research every year, and which translates as ‘Crack Cancer’.

It gave me the idea for a much bigger 24-hour indoor cycling event, which would be part of *Knæk Cancer* each year. The first cycling4cancer event took place in 2014 and we’ve continued every year since then. ▶



Above: cycling4cancer is an annual 24-hour mass participation indoor cycling event that first took place in 2014



*For a minimum DKK10,000 donation, companies buy a bike for the event and ask employees to ride it*

***“Exercise and positivity keeps cancer at bay. I will do this again and again and again to keep raising money for cancer research”***

*Above right: Denmark's top DJs give their time for free at cycling4cancer*

*Below right: A team of 24 incredible instructors take it in turns to each host one of the 24 hours of the event*



### ► **WHAT'S THE CONCEPT?**

Cycling4cancer is a 24-hour indoor cycling event that finishes at 6.00pm on the Saturday of *Knæk Cancer*, while the TV coverage is ongoing. For 2022, that meant starting at 6.00pm on Friday 28 October and finishing at 6.00pm on 29 October.

It's the ultimate corporate teamworking and networking event, with businesses paying for a bike – a minimum donation of DKK10,000 (around €1,350) that goes directly to *Knæk Cancer* – and asking their employees to ride it.

There are 24 sessions of 45–50 minutes each, with a short break in between while we change the instructor and DJ, and every bike must be ridden for the full 24 hours.

We've set DKK10,000 as the minimum donation because at this level, your company's name comes up in the *Knæk Cancer* TV coverage. Some organisations donate more, though: in 2022 we had a bank pay DKK50,000 for one bike, while a plumbing firm took two bikes at DKK25,000 each. Other companies pay DKK10,000 but also donate DKK5–10 per kilometre cycled by their employees.

We do also have individuals who fund a bike themselves and put a team together to ride, often because they have a relative who's sick or who they want to remember. These stories are very moving; I admit I find myself crying quite a lot throughout the 24 hours. However, the event is an overwhelmingly upbeat one, filled with positive vibes and happy memories of those we may have lost.

Finally, I have a couple of bikes where – if you really want to take part but can't organise a team or afford a whole bike – you can ride for an hour for DKK500.



### **TELL US ABOUT THE 2022 EVENT**

It nearly didn't happen, because my girlfriend was diagnosed with cancer in April and died in August. I honestly wasn't sure I had the energy to do it. I also started to question the purpose of doing all this every year when my loved ones were still dying.

But then I reminded myself of my personal motto – that exercise and positivity keeps cancer at bay – and I decided this was no time for quitting. Cancer never sleeps, and I will do this again and again and again to keep raising money for cancer research.

And it was an incredible event, with 118 BODY BIKES provided by our sponsor Fitness Engros in action for the 24 hours. That's 30 more than last year and there was a lot of love, happiness and sweat in the room!

People also brought family and friends to support them and enjoy the event: we had over 4,000 people in attendance.

We are hugely grateful to our 24 incredible instructors and our best-in-Denmark DJs who



**“Once we’ve added this year’s fundraising to the DKK8.3m we raised between 2014 and 2021, our running total will hit DKK10.8m”**

► gave their time for free, and our sponsors who provided the bikes, the venue, the refreshments, the lighting and everything else we needed to put the event on. As always, the whole thing was done for free: not one bit of money passes through my hands.

**WHAT’S YOUR ROLE ON THE DAY?**

I used to be one of the instructors, but I now host and push to get fundraising as high as possible. Between each session, I get up on stage and ask everyone in the saddle to post on their social media and LinkedIn accounts asking for sponsorship before they start, and to post again afterwards to say how far they cycled.

I then kick every session off – calling out “Knæk!” from the stage, to

which all the participants shout back “Cancer!” – before leaving it to the instructor and DJ to crank it up.

All sponsorship goes direct to *Knæk Cancer* using a dedicated MobilePay code, so funds are allocated to our event and we know how much we’ve raised.

**AND HOW MUCH DID YOU RAISE?**

I had hoped to raise DKK3m in 2022 (a little over €400,000), but with the economic crisis hitting hard, we didn’t quite reach that target: the figure we announced on the day was DKK2.1m.

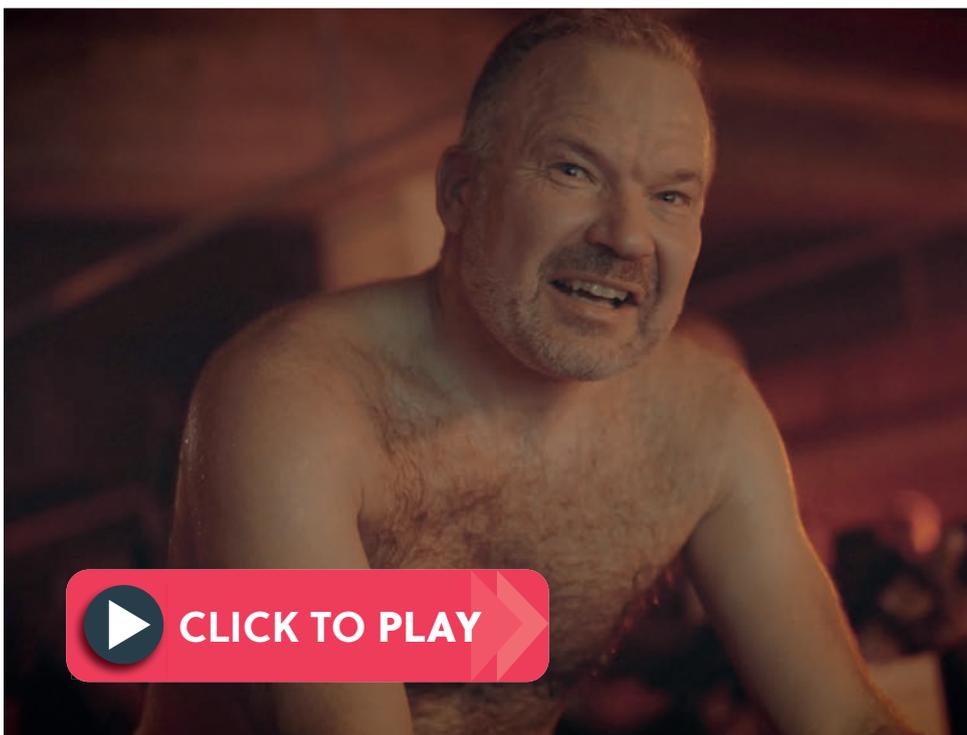
Money is still coming in, though; we’ve already passed DKK2.4m and, once the final bits of sponsorship are counted, I expect to hit DKK2.5m. I’m pleased with

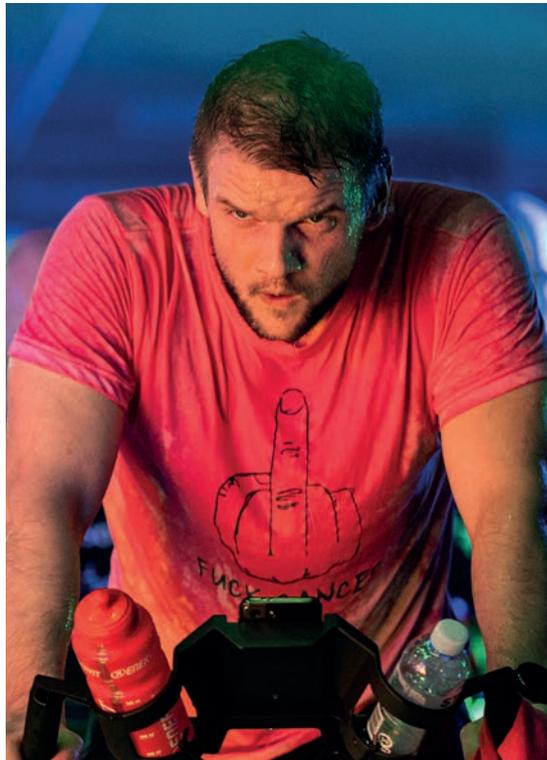
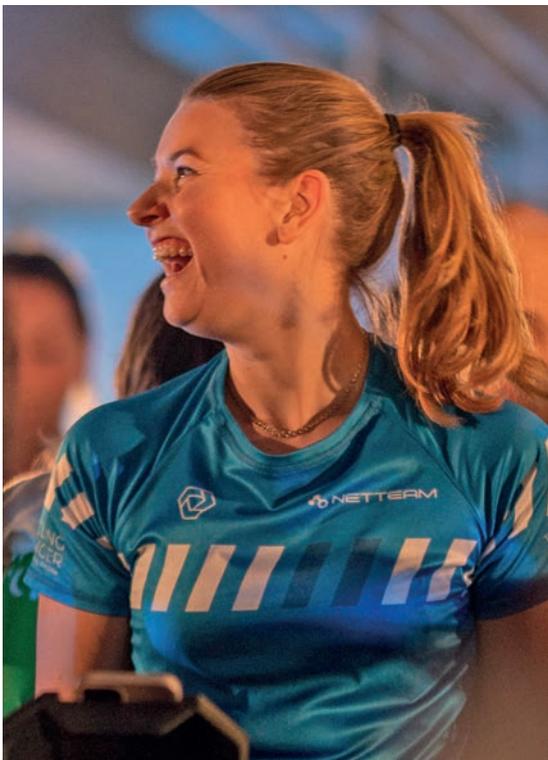


*Above: Some people create their own teams to ride for someone who's sick or who they've lost*

*Above left: BODY BIKE's Danish distributor Fitness Engros sponsored the event, providing 118 bikes*

*Left: Watch this fabulous video and immerse yourself in the buzz of cycling4cancer 2022!*







*Above: The rules state that every bike has to be ridden for the full 24 hours*

*Far left: Each session begins with Guhle shouting 'Knæk!' from the stage, and participants responding with 'Cancer!'*

*Left: Some companies sponsor their own riders for every kilometre they complete*

**“I’d love to make this a global event. I’d love us all to stick up our middle fingers and say together: ‘F\*ck cancer’”**

► that. *Knæk Cancer* lowered its overall 2022 forecasts by 30 per cent and ended up bringing in DKK117m on the day, down from DKK150m in 2021. Meanwhile, *cycling4cancer* will have raised DKK2.5m compared to DKK2.6m in 2021. In spite of all the pressures in the world at the moment, our event continues to have great momentum.

Once we’ve added 2022’s fundraising to the DKK8.3m we raised between 2014 and 2021, our running total will hit DKK10.8m.

#### **WHAT COMES NEXT FOR YOU?**

We’ll keep raising the bar with *cycling4cancer* and we’ll keep fighting.

At the moment, I organise just one event each year, although we do sell ‘f\*ck cancer’ merchandise throughout the year. I do this alongside a full-time job and it’s all-consuming: finishing at 6.00pm on the Saturday, by the Sunday morning I was already thinking about next year’s event!

However, I would like to grow to at least two events a year – one in the spring and one in October – as well as potentially organising some pop-up events too. I want to keep driving awareness of my motto and belief that exercise and positivity can keep cancer at bay.

I’d also love to make this a global event, finding local organisers who can partner with me to host simultaneous events around the world, with all funds going to cancer research in those countries. I’d love us all to stick up our middle fingers and say together: ‘F\*ck cancer’. ●

 [cycling4cancer](#)

# RIDE HIGH

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Issue 18

01.2023

# RIDE HIGH

*Special supplement*

**"HOW CAN SMALLER  
OPERATORS SURVIVE  
IN THIS CLIMATE?"**

**"DO WE PASS ON  
RISING COSTS TO  
THE CUSTOMER?"**

## A GLOBAL CRISIS?

**"Government subsidies are  
removing the imperative to  
think responsibly"**

# “Volatility will continue for the short to medium term”

**A**round the world, news headlines spotlight a spiralling cost of living crisis, with inflation rampant, the cost of energy and food rocketing, businesses closing in the face of unmanageable bills and consumer disposable income heavily squeezed.

With the war in Ukraine on its doorstep and a traditionally heavy reliance on Russian gas, Europe feels especially embattled; in the fitness sector, trade associations are firing warning signals about existential threats to business.

The challenges aren't limited to Europe, however, although not every country is feeling the same pinch: we spoke to a health club operator in Saudi Arabia who told us the cost of living crisis was “not something they were experiencing”.

So, how is our sector faring in different parts of the globe? We speak to operators across Europe, Asia-Pacific, Africa and the Americas to understand the region-by-region challenges facing our sector at the moment, and the strategies that might be deployed to navigate them.



Interview conducted 28 October 2022

# STEVEN WARD

*Strategy & innovation director,  
GO fit – Spain & Portugal*



People are saying we live in uncertain times. I disagree. It's certain that the volatility and complexity we're experiencing will continue for the short to medium term.

At GO fit, we're seeing continued demand for our product, with net growth every month for the past 20 months other than in the Omicron wave of December 2021. Key to this is our continued focus on delivering an overwhelming value

proposition; we will always offer value that far exceeds our actual membership fees. Our focus on measurably impacting people's lives is valued by customers to the point that we aren't a luxury they can dispose of, nor a commodity they can replace with a cheaper option.

Yet for our sector as a whole, we're now operating in a very different climate even from 12 months ago, and there is no easy solution to any of it.

*Below: GO fit's 10-year fixed energy agreement covers the majority of its needs across its estate*

**OUR SPECIALIST TEAM IS IN THE MARKET EVERY DAY, LOOKING AT FUTURES AND FLUCTUATIONS TO ENSURE WE PROCURE ENERGY AT THE BEST POSSIBLE TIME**



If you look back through history, inflationary environments such as the one we're in now typically end in recession, either of a technical nature or one that truly bites. We'll see interest rates continue to rise until there's a decline in economic activity, and this will hit many businesses in our sector hard – especially those that have scaled on what was once cheap debt, or grown through leveraged positions of their owners. We have yet to see what the impact of this will be, but it will undoubtedly also hit public sector construction and private sector borrowing.

I do see strong recovery for our sector in the long term, but things will remain tough in the short to medium term as central banks work to bring the situation under control.

Much of the conversation right now is around energy, which has always been a top agenda item for the GO fit executive team: our

# “Government subsidy interventions are removing the imperative to think responsibly about energy consumption”

brand values and commitment to sustainability mean that as an organisation, we want to be 100 per cent powered by green resources. We already have solar installations and other energy-generation investments in our facilities, but these will never provide all the energy we need year-round. So in 2019, GO fit entered into a 10-year fixed rate agreement with a leading green energy provider in Europe that covered the vast majority of our energy requirements.

It was a bold decision to make, because we were committing to

above-market rates at the time. However, the company felt it was the right thing to do for the planet and the board backed the decision.

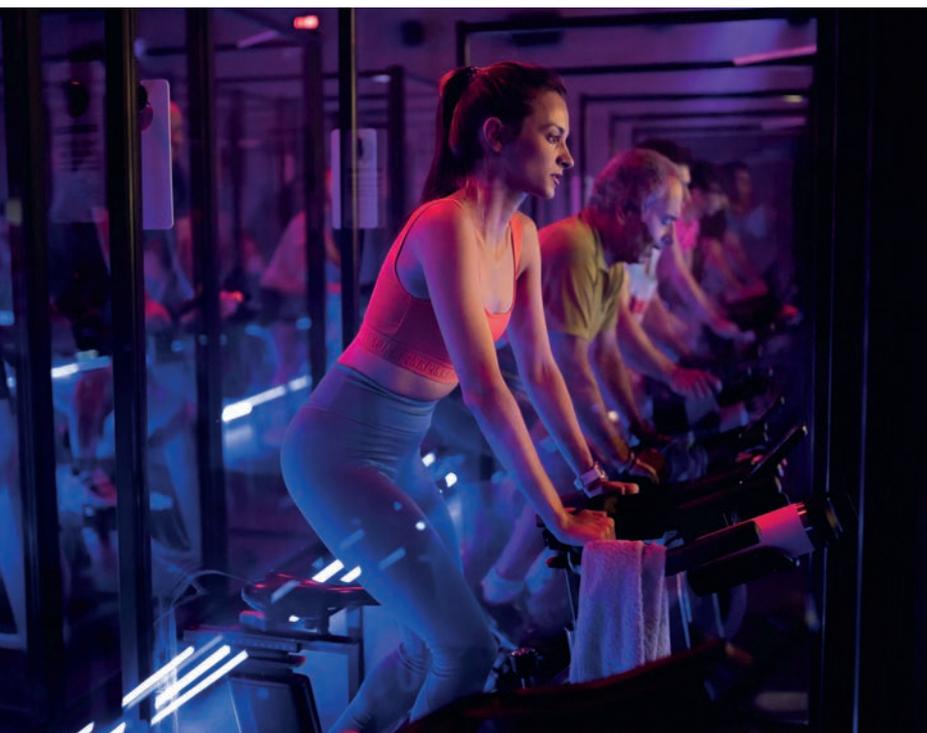
And now, although we never went into it for cost reasons, we're facing this crisis in a very strong position; I strongly suspect that, had my colleagues not had this foresight and sustainability agenda, our energy costs could have doubled by now.

We are feeling some impact of the current crisis, as a small proportion of our energy requirements aren't covered by our fixed arrangement. However, it's a fraction of what it could have been. We also have a comprehensive energy strategy for this remaining element, looking at a whole range of initiatives to build resilience ahead of certain future energy shocks over the next couple of years.

We have a relentless focus on identifying the best moments to procure energy: our specialist team is in the market every day, looking

*Above right: GO fit can adjust energy use in real time, based on things like footfall and the climate outdoors*

*Left: GO fit's focus on measurably impacting people's lives is highly valued by members*





at futures and fluctuations and making sure we're negotiating at the best possible time. As we speak today, for example, the recent warm weather means ships are sitting outside ports unable to deliver their gas, because reserves are full. It's pushed gas prices temporarily down, making now a great time to buy. That won't still be the case next week. Sorry if you're reading this some time after!

We have an equally relentless focus on efficiency of energy usage across our business, with highly intelligent facilities run by highly experienced facility professionals. We have visibility and control over our whole estate in real time, so we can adjust energy usage in real time based on customer need and demand, footfall, the climate outdoors, the temperature in the

club and so on. This has a significant impact on our overall consumption.

This is what modern, world-class facility management looks like, but not everyone is doing it yet. It's a cold thing to say, but government subsidy interventions in the face of this crisis – the figure currently stands at €500bn globally – are weakening the price signal to businesses and removing the imperative to think responsibly about energy consumption. Poorly managed organisations are being bailed out at the cost of well-managed organisations, rather than being forced to operate as sustainably as possible. It might be essential in the short term, but economically, this moral hazard is wrong. Every organisation must take responsibility for its sustainable use and future

procurement of energy, and this crisis has brought that home.

Looking further ahead, all indications are that we will see a natural energy revolution across Europe in the medium term, with significant policy reforms that decouple the cost of electricity – and with it, the cost of green energy – from the cost of gas. We will also see major infrastructure investments in renewables. This will be instrumental in the move towards a self-sufficient, sustainable future that gives us more energy security and that's simultaneously positive for businesses and the planet.



Interview conducted 13 October 2022



# MICHAL HOMOLA

Founder, Terra Hale – UK

**I**t's true that the current energy crisis is impacting everyone. However, our lower energy usage means we are less affected than others.

Ours is a group of three – soon to be four – personal training and body transformation studios in London, UK, where everything revolves around being eco-friendly. And I mean everything, from plants in our studios for oxygen to exploring ways to minimise our carbon footprint. For example, as we look to expand overseas, we want to minimise how much equipment we need to import, so we're experimenting with gathering plastic waste and using it to 3D print the equipment we need. In the process, we'll also help clean up the locations where we want to build. It's a win-win.

We teach our customers to be more eco-friendly in their lives, too, from giving them bamboo toothbrushes to educating them on eliminating the big users of electricity from their lives.

We've certainly done that in our clubs. Our lighting is the most energy-efficient LED lighting you can get, and we've kept the set-up pretty simple. There's nothing flashing, nothing fancy, and at any point in time, we only have the lights on in rooms that need to be lit. The same applies outside: the lighting in our external signage is only switched on at night.

It's similar with heating. We have no boiler at all – just electric panels in the ceiling that heat up really quickly. As soon as the room is warm enough, we turn them off. And we define 'warm enough' differently from most. Even when it's cold outside, we focus on getting our clients warm through exercise rather than having the room really warm when they come in. That's not to say



we make it uncomfortable for people, not at all, but our rooms are always a bit below your typical room temperature. We soon get them – and the people in them – warm through working out!

Other than that, all we have plugged in are a music speaker and a coffee machine. We don't provide towels for our customers so we don't have to wash them – that's a very power-intensive process. Neither do we have steamrooms or saunas. And while we do offer showers, only



Right: Plants are positioned around the studios for oxygen

Below: By keeping things simple, Homola estimates that Terra Hale uses about 80 per cent less energy than the typical gym



**WE DEFINE 'WARM ENOUGH' DIFFERENTLY FROM MOST. EVEN WHEN IT'S COLD OUTSIDE, WE FOCUS ON GETTING OUR CLIENTS WARM THROUGH EXERCISE**

around 10 per cent of our members use them. They're also electric showers, so we're only heating the exact amount of water we need.

We use clean energy – wind, solar and hydro power – via our renewable energy providers, and none of our equipment is powered. Our rowers use water resistance, our treadmills are self-powered and our bikes actually generate electricity that we sell back to the grid. It isn't enough to live on or run the business on, but compare that to having

to power plugged-in bikes and treadmills and it isn't hard to see which is the most sustainable.

I know this might all sound like small details, but it really does add up. I would estimate that we use around 80 per cent less energy than the typical gym, in spite of being open from 5.00am to 10.00pm.

 @terrahaleldn



# ANDREAS PAULSEN

CEO, EuropeActive

*Interview conducted 18 October 2022*



**A**cross Europe, we're seeing governments collaborating and taking extraordinary steps to bring energy prices – particularly electricity and gas – under control. Political efforts are being coordinated through the EU to ensure gas reserves are full, for example, and significant political measures are being taken to bring more energy supply into the market and to temporarily cap energy company profits to quickly bring down consumer prices.

As a result, we're seeing gas prices begin to flatten and even fall. This is likely to continue in the coming months as the EU's domestic production of gas and

other types of energy is dramatically increased, reducing reliance on import from places like Russia.

In the current cost of energy crisis, inflation seems largely centred around energy and food supply, which in turn is directly linked to the situation in Ukraine; it is not general inflation. If we bring energy under control, it is likely that the cost of living crisis can be brought under control generally.

With this in mind, we cross our fingers that EU and national measures take effect and start to improve the situation quickly. And, of course, we appeal to everyone to take societal responsibility as citizens, reducing daily energy consumption as much as possible.

For our sector, there are significant challenges; for many businesses, they are existential. Yet even amid these challenging circumstances, we must keep fighting and stay focused on our bright future; over the next couple of years, leadership will be defined by effectively addressing current circumstances, turning challenge into opportunity.

I believe one way for our sector to get value from the current situation is to use it to inform our long-term energy and environmental sustainability. We must look at ways to cut superfluous or unnecessary energy consumption, and crucially,



*Left: Clubs must communicate strategically with members as tough decisions are taken*

*Top right: Clubs with facilities like saunas may need to temporarily close them*

*Bottom right: Open, honest conversations with members will be key, making changes in dialogue with them, says Paulsen*



PHOTO: © PIXABAY

we must do it in dialogue with club members, communicating strategically with them both now and moving forward.

Short term, as a reaction to the current situation, I'm sure most members will understand that tough decisions have to be made. Clubs with facilities like saunas, for example, will likely have to temporarily close them. Open, honest conversations with members will be necessary.

Longer term, it's about building sustainability into our strategies, looking at things like insulation, smart electricity, heating and water systems. Put together, they can significantly reduce energy consumption and costs. They can also be part of our collective image-building as a sector for the future.

In Denmark, for example, people are being offered government-backed loans to gradually pay back any energy costs that exceed their Q4 2021 baseline. Similar measures are being offered elsewhere in Europe. This represents a valuable opportunity to build cost-reduction measures into our longer-term strategy – starting now – and factor repayments into our recovery plans.

I see a crucial role for industry associations, too. We must actively encourage sharing of best



PHOTO: © ANDREA PIACQUADIO

***“If we bring energy under control, it is likely that the cost of living crisis can be brought under control generally”***

practice among our members and partner associations across Europe, and ensure politicians understand the negative impact on population health that will result from our sector not being able to deliver its services.

I see a very positive future for our sector as we position ourselves as need-to-have health rather than nice-to-have leisure and consumer

demand for personalised health and wellbeing continues to grow. But there will be challenges on the way. Overcoming the present need to balance rising energy costs against squeezed disposable income among consumers is unquestionably one of them.

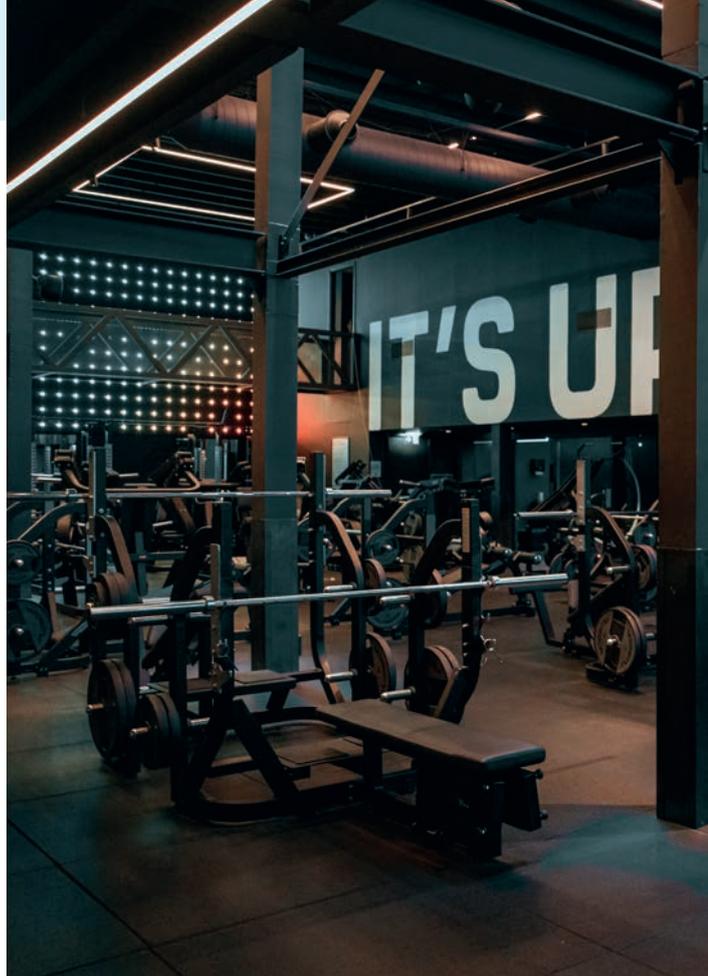
 @europe\_active



## JORDY KOOL

Chair, Urban Gym Group  
– Netherlands

Interview conducted 2 November 2022



Urban Gym Group is performing well. Profitability isn't yet back to pre-COVID levels – not least because we've made a number of acquisitions and opened new clubs – but average club attendance is exceeding 2019 levels, driven in particular by our Trainmore brand.

There are a number of headwinds, but decisions we've made over the last couple of years are helping us navigate these.

Prices of equipment are up; one supplier has raised its prices by 16 per cent. Fortunately we saw COVID as a time to invest, including new equipment across our estate. In combination with a diversification of our supplier portfolio, we've avoided the worst of the price increases.

There's huge pressure on salaries, too. Our staff make a difference in our business, so we'd already planned to pay them more to help with their own rising costs. However, this is a major consideration for all operators right now.

Rent is also up: in the Netherlands, landlords are allowed to increase rent in line with the consumer price index, which is currently 14 per cent. I'm expecting the government to get involved, so that may change, but meanwhile we're in a good position: our strong footprint



*Left: The group's strong performance is being driven by Trainmore in particular*

*Bottom left: Buying kit during COVID means UGG has avoided the worst of the price rises*

**“We’re doing what we can to lower our energy consumption, including speaking to landlords about co-funding solar panels”**

in Amsterdam and our continued growth makes it wise for landlords to support us.

Rising electricity and gas prices are having a huge impact on the sector, but we hedged our costs for the long term and aren't feeling it yet: at the majority of our clubs, we're still on the old prices until the end of 2023.

It will come, though, so we're doing what we can to lower our consumption now: building smarter, including LED lighting, and speaking to landlords about co-funding solar panels, as well as a range of other things. We're also getting better at simply turning things off when not in use.

We already removed sunbeds as not core to our healthy offering, and in some clubs removed saunas that weren't used much to expand the gym. Both decisions, while not driven by energy costs, have positively impacted our energy use.

But some things are harder to control: air conditioning, for example, which members can sometimes even turn on themselves, and the length of people's post-workout showers. And in the end, however much you try to cut consumption, you still have a service and a product to offer. I can only sympathise with those who have swimming pools to run.

I've been speaking to operators whose electricity bills are five, six, seven times higher than they used to be. You're never going to be able to compensate for that. Even two or three times will send some businesses into a loss.

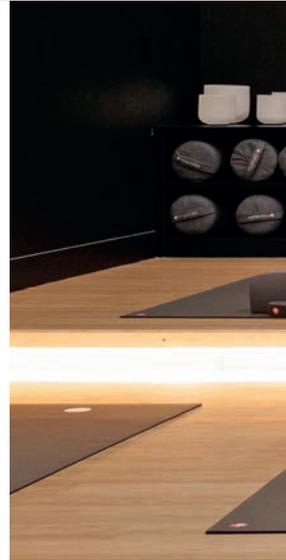
And all of this at a time when interest rates are rising and impacting the ability to raise debt; when customer acquisition costs are going up and lifetime value down as members pay less and don't stay as long; when over-supply in the boutique segment means aggregators won't be able to subsidise everyone; and when even high-end wellness operators, unless they have particularly strong margins and non-price sensitive members, will find it tough.

We aren't exempt from the pressures. We've closed two of four standalone High Studios, for example, as they weren't making a profit, and put the programming into GX studios at our other clubs instead. But we're in a good position having raised new debt at good rates during COVID. We may not have the deepest pockets, but we do at least have pockets. We can survive another crisis and make further acquisitions. And we do expect to make acquisitions. How can smaller operators survive in this climate? There's only so far you can raise prices for the consumer, if at all.

Interview conducted 10 October 2022

# JEB BALISE

Founder & CEO,  
Drop Fitness – USA



**E**nergy costs have risen in the US, but from own experience and conversations with other operators, not yet in a way that's prohibitive to doing business.

We can still manage for now, which also means there's no government support at this stage.

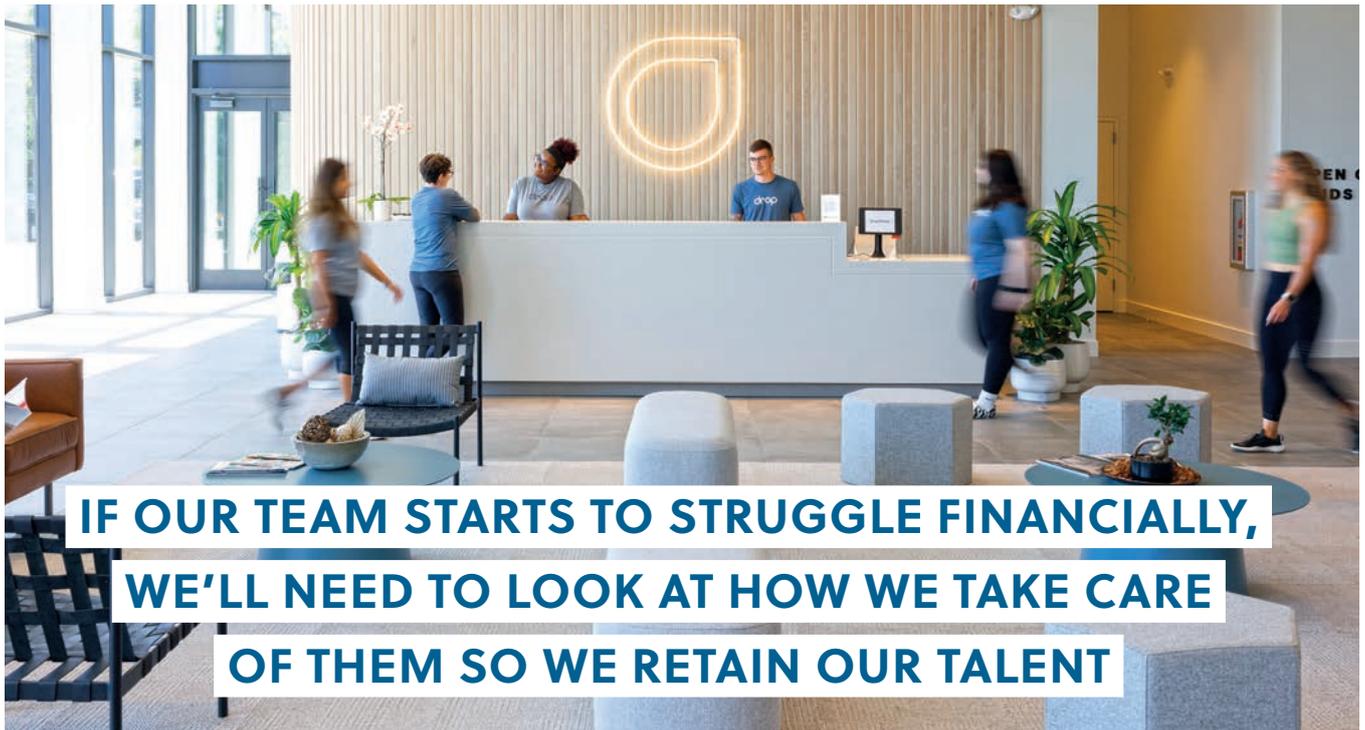
Beyond this, I can only speak for Drop Fitness: our single-site operation that's been open for four months and that operates a very distinct model. The way we respond to any challenges will inevitably be shaped by this.

We only have a small fitness floor alongside three boutique studios, so plugged-in CV

equipment accounts for less than 20 per cent of our product. It means we aren't severely impacted by this power requirement.

In fact, I'm just as mindful of our employees and the potential indirect costs of any future cost of living crisis. If our team starts to struggle financially – finding it harder to travel to work, among other things – we'll need to look at how we take care of them so we retain our talent.

But this is all hypothetical for now, because as I say, we aren't yet seeing prohibitively high costs. At Drop Fitness, our energy bills currently account for around 5 per cent of



**IF OUR TEAM STARTS TO STRUGGLE FINANCIALLY,  
WE'LL NEED TO LOOK AT HOW WE TAKE CARE  
OF THEM SO WE RETAIN OUR TALENT**



Above: Drop Fitness has three boutique studios and a gym floor in one location

Right: Balise will eat into his margin as long as possible to keep members happy

Below left: Might people turn off energy at home and visit the club more often?



our total costs. That might get closer to 10 per cent depending on club utilisation levels.

We still have to be prepared for rising heating costs this winter, though, including looking carefully at how we distribute heat and energy around our club. We'll also address obvious things like turning heat off when we're closed overnight and carefully scheduling switch-on times so the club is welcoming as soon as we open the doors, but without wasting energy.

But there will only be so much we can do, because as fitness operators, there's no practical way to simply switch everything off. This is what we do. The value we bring to our customers starts with the provision of equipment in an adequately heated, adequately lit environment 365 days a year. And who says people might not start coming more often, so they can turn off the power at home for a while? We'll certainly keep an eye on club usage and energy prices to see what happens to our bills.

But still, for now this isn't one of my top five considerations; as a new business in a market where we aren't yet unduly worried about energy costs, I'm much more focused

on margin improvement, managing future capacity constraints and so on. It means I haven't really given much thought to what our recession play might be.

If it comes to it, I think the big question for our business will be: do we pass on rising costs to the customer or not? Will they understand, or will their own reduced disposable income in such a climate make a price hike something they can't swallow?

And our answer, within the model we operate, will be to eat in to our own margin for as long as we can. I believe competitive advantage will come from continuing to provide customers with the right service at the right price.



**W**e're experiencing record inflation in Nigeria: double digits across the board, with food and power taking up a higher proportion of people's monthly budgets. Our culture is to push on through – communities supporting each other rather than expecting relief from the government – yet there's no getting around the pressure on disposable income right now. Everyone's feeling the pinch and being very careful with energy usage and food wastage.

Our currency also continues to devalue against the dollar. This combination of inflation and depreciation means international costs and overheads – replacement equipment or lockers, for example, which are always priced in US\$ – have tripled in the past year.

Meanwhile, flooding in various parts of the country, including large areas of farmland, is contributing to unemployment, transportation and logistics issues and high food prices, where inflation has reached 23 per cent or more.

So it's the perfect storm right now, but then consider that Nigeria has

never generated enough electricity to meet national requirements. We've only ever generated around 3.5GW, which is 10 per cent of what the country needs. People have traditionally used diesel generators to make up the 90 per cent deficit, but with the war in Ukraine, diesel prices are up 70 per cent in 2022 alone – something nobody could have expected or budgeted for.

Many businesses in Nigeria are therefore looking to renewable energy to reduce their diesel use. Fortunately, when we built Beyond Fitness, we incorporated a solar

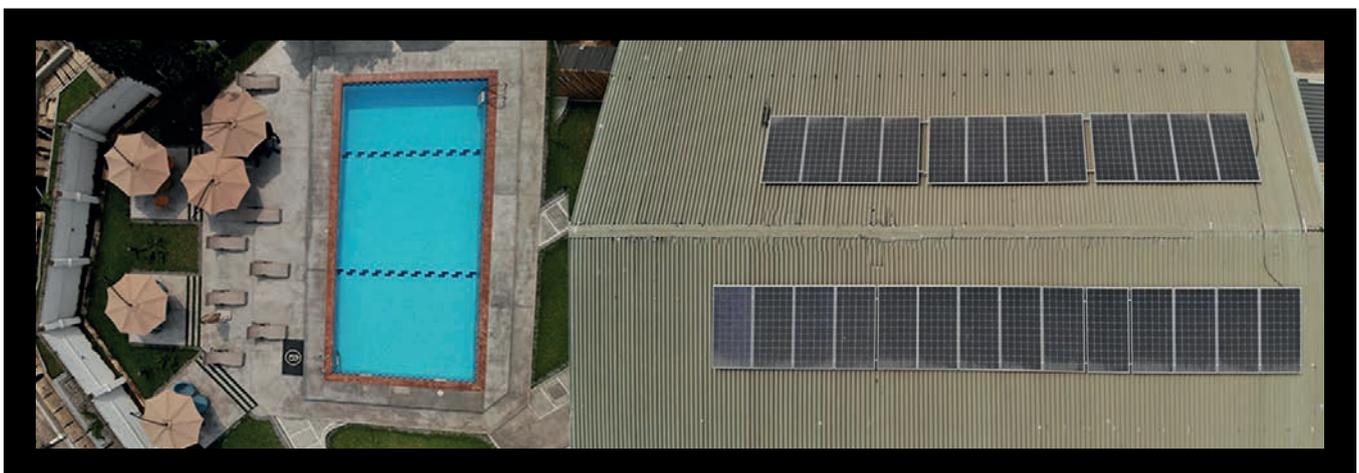
inverter and battery system as a back-up. When everything is on in the club, the power load is 45kW. However, during our off-peak periods, we can reduce the power load from the building to 12kW, which is our peak solar capacity. This still powers all our critical equipment.

Our fitness equipment isn't powered – our bikes, strength room and barre room – so our energy usage is mainly down to cooling costs. For this reason, we're now being particularly mindful of class times and utilisation rates. We



## SIMI WILLIAMS

*Founder, Beyond Fitness – Nigeria*





Interview conducted 25 October 2022



*Above: Beyond schedules classes in a way that minimises air con needs*

*Below: Beyond Fitness was built with a solar inverter and battery system as a back-up from day one*

previously had a mid-morning class and were looking to add a lunchtime one, but we can't meet the cooling costs at these hotter times of day with solar power alone. It just isn't possible to spec our system to do all the air conditioning. These class times therefore became non-viable, especially given they might only have been 40 per cent full.

Instead, we've worked hard to optimise very early morning and evening classes, getting utilisation rates as high as possible. These times suit our working professional community and I'm hugely grateful for the way they've embraced the change. They see Beyond as a place of solace in the face of

**“Nigeria has never generated enough electricity. People traditionally used diesel generators to make up the deficit, but diesel prices are up 70%”**

general uncertainty, are willing to spend on the value we offer, and have supported each other to make the new class times a habit.

We've added outdoor classes too, and indoors only use air conditioning where and when necessary. In our changing rooms, for example, we turn it on just before the end of class and leave it on for about an hour after class. Our lighting, air con, hot water for showers... it's all carefully scheduled around our class timetable and usage data, and this is saving us a

lot of money. We've also changed team deployment to productively use the new down-time at the club.

Finally, we're looking to increase our solar capacity. We're restricted by how much we can put on our roof, but we are considering more solar panels and batteries to generate and store more energy. The more we can go off-grid, mitigating the rising cost of diesel by harvesting solar power, the better.

 @beyondfitnessng

Interview conducted 2 November 2022



# ANTONIO IOZZO

*Founder & CEO,  
Body Action Gym  
– South Africa*

Our new building that was designed to be as energy-efficient as possible. We were the first building in Africa to have a full FRIT dot façade: little white ceramic dots baked into the double glazing that take up about 30 per cent of the area of the glass. Light still comes through and you can see out, but it saves you around 35 per cent on your heating/cooling costs. Our whole building is fitted with this special glass.

This was definitely not the cheap option – our façade cost 60 per cent more than normal glass – but it will pay back over the long term. It's also what consumers are beginning to expect, not to mention the right thing to do.

We're also off the grid for our water consumption, with two boreholes on the property, and we've put as many solar panels on our roof as possible. But honestly, the electricity they generate is just a drop in the ocean of our building's energy needs.

Meanwhile, the national energy grid is in chaos. Since before the pandemic, we've had power cuts across the country of between three and eight hours a day – the result of a steady decline in the maintenance of electricity power stations over the last three decades. The government is now talking about appointing independent energy



*Body Action Gym continues to invest in the latest equipment – a strong USP over budget-stretched local competitors*



**THE GYM IS SUBSIDISED BY MY OTHER BUSINESSES. IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE, IF IT HAD TO STAND ALONE, IT WOULD NOT SURVIVE**

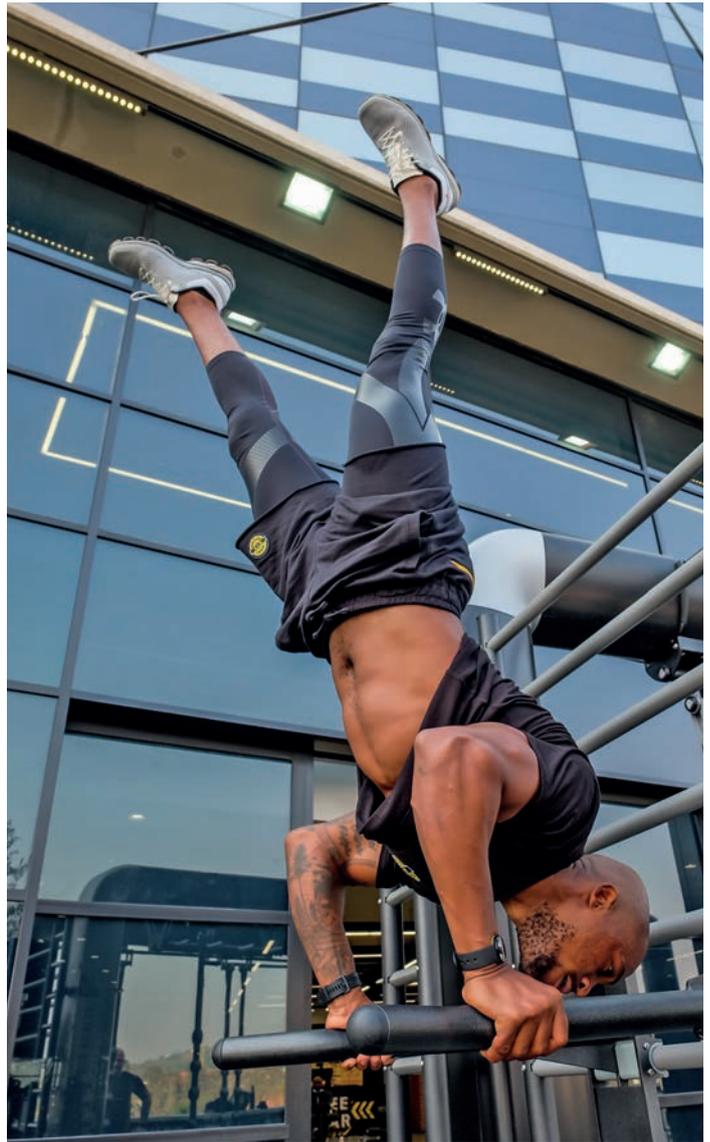
## A GLOBAL CRISIS?

providers and letting individuals feed into the grid, but that's a long way off.

For now, if you don't have a big generator, you're in serious trouble: I'm currently spending around £20,000 (US\$22,500) a month on diesel. And that's on top of electricity, which has almost quadrupled in price with another 25 per cent rise on the cards. I spend around £50,000 (US\$56,300) a month on electricity to power our building and we don't even have a swimming pool in our gym. Clubs that do have pools have mostly stopped heating them now; members have to accept the water temperature as it is.

So it's fairly doom and gloom in South Africa from an energy perspective. Yet as ridiculous as these costs are, we have to swallow them if we want to keep running our gym. I certainly can't pass any of the increased costs on to our members, as the pressure on consumers' disposable income – with inflation close to 20 per cent – means gym membership is already a luxury.

I just have to hope the Competition Commission finds in our favour in March and forces Discovery to extend its gym membership subsidy scheme to other health club brands beyond Virgin Active and Planet Fitness. We're confident it will, but in the meantime I'll keep subsidising things myself and focusing on growing our membership base through aggressive marketing.



*Above: Consumers are struggling with rising costs, so Body Action Gym isn't raising its fees*

*Left: Energy costs must be swallowed to keep operating, says Iozzo*



*Above: The new building is the first in Africa to have a full FRIT dot façade*

And it's working, because while we continue to invest heavily in the latest and greatest equipment, many gyms here can't even afford to maintain or repair their current equipment, with 'out of order' signs everywhere. Any additional investment secured by our competitors isn't going to refurbishments or new kit. It's just keeping their gyms open.

So how are we able to keep investing? One simple fact: the gym business isn't our bread and butter. I run an insurance company here in South Africa, as well as a construction company, with everything in the same building. The gym is subsidised by my other businesses and always had a three-year plan to break even. In the current climate, if it had to stand alone, it would not survive.

***“Clubs with pools have mostly stopped heating them. Members have to accept the water temperature as it is.”***

 @bodyactiongymsa

Interview conducted 26 October 2022

# SIMON FLINT



CEO, Evolution Wellness  
– South-East Asia

Energy is not currently our primary concern in the markets where we operate: Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Malaysia. More significant at this stage is the fact we're still dealing with the legacy of COVID.

Pleasingly, we're on-track to reach our pre-pandemic bottom line in Indonesia by January 2023, but our other markets are lagging. Cash preservation and very careful deployment of capital remain our primary focus while membership numbers are recovering.

All that said, energy inflation is an increasingly important consideration, with costs starting to rise across all markets, most notably in Singapore.

Pre-pandemic, we conducted a pilot in the Philippines, choosing a medium-sized club (1,500sq m) to test the impact of some energy initiatives. We averaged our findings out across club sizes – the different brands and business models in our group – and believe we can make annual savings of US\$34,000 per club. When you consider that we have over 100 clubs in our estate, that's clearly significant.

Breaking this figure down, installing energy-efficient lights and motion sensors can save

us US\$12,000 per club, with another US\$10,000 of savings to be made in our air conditioning and mechanical ventilation. Water efficiencies drive a further US\$3,000 of savings. We can save US\$3,000 on the use of in-club TV systems. And other operational tweaks – putting saunas and steamrooms on timers, for example – can save on average US\$6,000 a year.

Of course, all of this requires capital: it will cost around

*Right: Consumers now prioritise health and wellbeing, which may make it possible to raise prices in the future*

*Below: Evolution Wellness is enhancing its personal training offering with new tech support*





***“We conducted a pilot to test the impact of some energy initiatives and believe we can make annual savings of US\$34,000 per club”***

US\$12,000 to upgrade the lighting in a medium-sized club, for example, meaning a year to see a return. But regardless of what we’re paying per unit of energy, regardless of energy inflation, these savings are there for the taking. We’ll start with Singapore and carefully time the roll-out of this work to other markets as we continue to manage our resources.

We also have to recognise that we aren’t the only ones managing our resources at the moment. Faced with inflationary pressures and rumours of an economic downturn, all compounded by

COVID, consumers are currently being very careful where they spend their money. In the immediate term, it’s therefore vital that we offer high perceived value. That means maintaining our focus on engagement, return frequency and diversity of training opportunities, and we’re investing in our product as fast as we can in the current climate. That includes enhancing our PT offering with new tech support and bringing Vitruvian’s revolutionary strength and conditioning technology into our clubs, to redefine the way people think about this category.

We’ve also rolled out modular memberships, whereby members pay only for the products and services they want. Our research indicates that 63 per cent of new joiners on modular memberships would consider upgrading to a full membership in the future – most notably, when their finances allow.

So, I do feel positive as I look forward. I believe consumers are now making health and wellbeing a priority and I’m hopeful that, in time, this will allow us to raise prices in line with inflation – something price sensitivity in most markets has previously prevented us from doing.



*Left: FLYPROJECT is a luxury brand and less impacted than others by squeezed discretionary spend*

*Below: Rent is the largest cost, followed by wages, says Choong. Energy costs aren't a major concern.*



**THE CHALLENGE ACROSS THE FITNESS SECTOR REMAINS THE AFTERMATH OF THE PANDEMIC. WHAT'S AFFECTING US MOST ARE THE NEW HYBRID WORKING PATTERNS.**



Interview conducted 25 October 2022

# KENNY CHOONG

Co-founder, FLYPROJECT – Malaysia



**I**n Malaysia, energy costs aren't a major issue: we're a net producer of electricity and sell petrol to the world. Rent is the largest cost to our business, followed by wages – the latter a variable cost as instructors are paid per class.

The country is experiencing inflation and our currency is depreciating, which obviously affects discretionary spending including gym fees. FLYPROJECT sits at the luxury end of the scale, though, with most of our customers earning above average salaries, so this impacts us less than other operators.

The challenge that's common across the fitness sector – and it is specific to our sector, as other industries such as F&B are performing well – remains the aftermath of the pandemic.

We were in on/off lockdown for one out of two years, and while the bounceback after the first three-month lockdown was quick, recovery after that was slower as people saw the number of deaths rise and became more afraid. Since then, lifestyles have changed, outdoor exercise has become popular, people have found other ways to be active.

But what's affecting us most of all are the new hybrid working patterns. In Kuala Lumpur, the traffic is really bad; people simply won't travel to a gym near work if they aren't in the office that day, and when so many businesses are operating a 50/50 hybrid model, this has a big impact on nearby gyms. We're still only achieving 65 per cent of pre-pandemic attendance. Most operators in Malaysia are cashflow positive again, but few are back to where they were before the pandemic.

As I say, energy bills don't have a huge impact on our operating costs, which is good because our shopping mall locations mean we have to leave the lights on even when we aren't running classes. However, we are making economies elsewhere. For example, during lockdown we stopped providing towels for hygiene reasons and we still don't offer them now. Customers have embraced the hygiene argument and they're happy to bring their own, but it's also a cost saving for us while revenues continue to lag post-pandemic.

 @flyproject.co

Interview conducted 31 October 2022

# TIMOTHY FELIX

CEO, Active Fitness – Singapore



**T**here's an adjustment period going on in Singapore at the moment.

Now we're out of the pandemic bubble and allowed to do what we want again, people's disposable income – for a while heavily focused on health and wellness – is being spread more broadly as they seek to experience life again, and especially travel. Disposable income remains strong, in spite of inflation going through the roof, but our sector isn't enjoying as much of it as it has over the last couple of years.

Customers are also reluctant to sign up for long-term packages now, preferring to pay a premium for smaller packages that make

it easier to travel and flex around having to return to the office.

Meanwhile, particularly in indoor cycling, supply has grown to the point that it's outstripping demand. Our lockdowns weren't as extended as in other markets – Singapore is small and the population obedient – and people were invested in their health, so many new brands emerged during that time. I would estimate that the number of clubs offering indoor cycling doubled during 2021.

That's now driving down prices and forcing some closures. People here can afford to pay more, but over-supply is pushing things the other way just as inflation is soaring and operating costs rising.



*Above: To protect itself from a price war caused by over-supply, Active Fitness will focus on local, residential areas and build community engagement*

*Left: We can't allow our workout spaces to become stuffy, says Felix*



**INDOOR CYCLING SUPPLY HAS GROWN TO THE POINT THAT IT'S OUTSTRIPPING DEMAND. THAT'S DRIVING DOWN PRICES JUST AS INFLATION IS SOARING AND OPERATING COSTS RISING**

All of this is an interesting challenge and one we're developing strategies to address – focusing on local, residential areas where we can build community engagement, for example.

Then in terms of business costs, electricity prices are up: they had doubled but are currently back down to about 1.5 times what they were. Our rented mall locations prevent us from installing anything like solar power, but we are educating our staff to keep energy usage as low as possible.

We already have LED lighting and non-powered equipment, and

as a boutique operation we can turn things off when there are no classes. But we have to deliver a certain level of experience, and air conditioning is a big part of that. We've turned the temperature up a couple of degrees in our reception areas, but we can't allow our workout spaces to become stuffy. Rising electricity prices are simply a bullet we have to bite.

The greater challenge comes in the shape of manpower costs and rent, which are very high in Singapore. We're identifying unnecessary personnel costs and restructuring accordingly, so we

can offer better deals to those who are vital to our operation.

But I'm pragmatic about it all. I've run my own company for nine years and I know you can't always fly high. A lot of people in fitness have only ever known it to be on an upswing, as it was for perhaps five years before COVID, but things can go downhill too, however strong your business and brand. Rather than looking for things to blame it on, you have to be ready to identify the issues and implement change.

 @performance.af

Interview conducted 27 October 2022

## BEN LUCAS



*Founder & CEO,  
Flow Athletic – Australia*

**W**e aren't really experiencing an energy crisis in Australia at the moment. Our challenge is more around inflationary pressures off the back of two lockdowns.

The pandemic took 35 per cent off our numbers – membership and turnover – and we're now trying to regrow our business in an economic headwind. We're doing well though. I'm feeling optimistic.

There are cost of living concerns in Australia and as a result we currently lose one to two members a week. However, we're adding five or six a week; we operate at the premium end of the market, meaning most people still have disposable income to spend with us.

So, what are the cost of living concerns for consumers here? It's mainly interest rates – meaning mortgages and rent – as well as petrol and food, the latter due to a series of natural disasters affecting production. We aren't hearing people talking about electricity or gas prices at the moment.

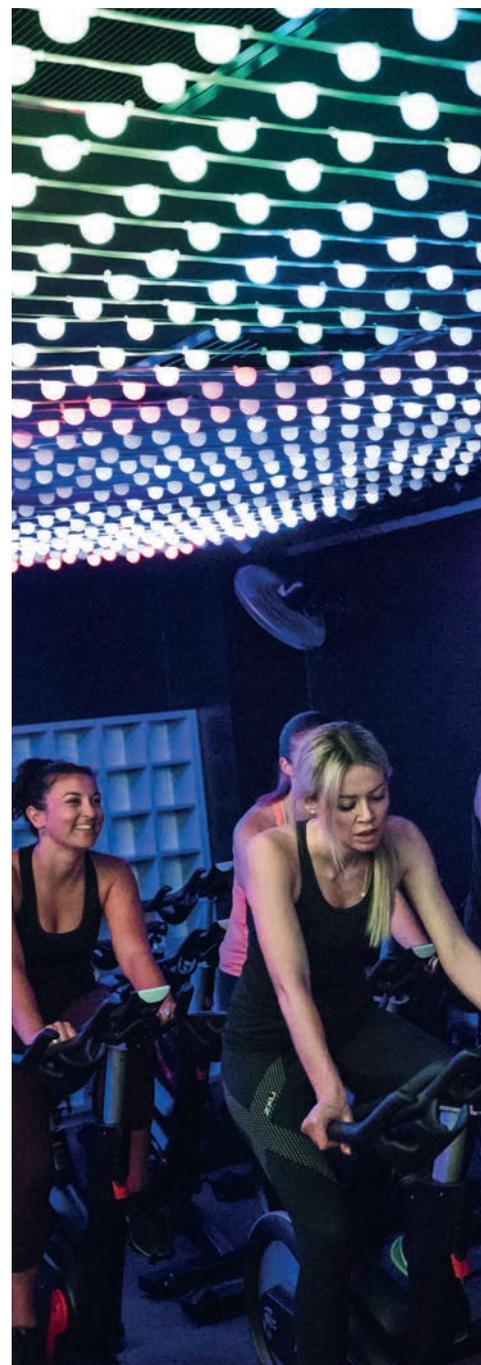
For our business, what's going up are wages – I value our team and want to make sure they can afford to live in the current climate – and energy to a lesser degree.

Fortunately, rent is unchanged; commercial sector rents aren't going up in the same way as residential rents, because with a pending global recession, landlords would rather keep properties full.

Electricity prices are due to go up a predicted 20 per cent in 2023, and a further 10 per cent in 2024, which obviously is a challenge. But if our bill goes up from, say, A\$30,000 to A\$36,000 a year, will that spell the end of our business? Not really. It isn't fantastic, but compared to being shut for 250 days... give me an extra A\$16,000 of electricity fees any day. Framed in the context of the last two and a half years, today's economic headwinds are the least of our challenges.

I do, however, believe the cost of electricity could double over the next five years, so we do need to be smart about it. As a premium operation, we wouldn't want to cut energy usage anywhere in the club, so we're looking to install a solar power system. Costing around A\$35,000, this could generate around 60 per cent of our electricity needs – including our air con and lighting – and achieve payback in three years.

 @flowathletic





*“Electricity prices are due to go up, but compared to being locked down for 250 days, give me an extra A\$16,000 of electricity fees any day”*

*Below: A solar power system could generate 60% of Flow Athletic's electricity needs, including air con and lighting*



# RIDE HIGH

*Special supplement*

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