

Issue 22

09.2024

INDOOR CYCLING INSIGHTS & INSPIRATION

RIDE HIGH

Safety first

Why TikTok is "bad news" for indoor cycling

SHOW & TELL

How effort data can motivate new exercisers

Bumps on bikes

Why indoor cycling is the perfect pregnancy workout

ON THE COVER

BRETT SUTTON

"Indoor cycling accounts for 15% of all club attendances"



Melissa Power is fighting back against unsafe riding. Find out more on page 20.

“We need to make ‘indoor cycling instructor’ a job worth doing well; I’d like it to count for something on a CV”



Redefining a rockstar

If I asked you to describe the perfect indoor cycling class, what would you say? For me, it’s always about the instructor – but crucially, it’s not about their prowess or their performance in the saddle. It’s about how they make me feel.

It’s why I was so delighted to read the interview with Melissa Power on page 20 of this issue, where she airs her concerns over indoor cycling’s breed of rockstar instructor.

She explains: “Of course you want a great instructor, but what actually defines ‘great’ is how they make participants feel. It absolutely isn’t about using class to show off what they can do.” Hear, hear Melissa.

The other trend she takes issue with is unsafe riding. To quote her again: “TikTok and Instagram have popularised double time, but it’s unsafe and bad for the joints.” At her Cadence studio, choreography is “mostly there as a break from power”.

This is music to my ears. Power has to be at the heart of training, even if presented in a less scientific way. It can’t just be about dancing on a bike.

Paco Gonzalez agrees, viewing indoor cycling as ‘undercover training’ where people get great results even while having fun. In his interview on page 40, he offers his advice to a new generation of instructors: “You aren’t only there to put a smile on people’s

faces. You’re also there to help them achieve tangible physical results.”

Paco is truly a rockstar in all the right ways: full of empathy, infectious enthusiasm and a passion he’s desperate to share. We need more of this in our sector – and it starts, I believe, by recognising the responsibility operators have to the young instructors in their clubs.

We need to make ‘indoor cycling instructor’ a job worth doing well; I’d like it to count for something if a young person has GX instructor on their CV, just as it does if they’ve been in the armed forces. Let’s properly educate them and focus on the leadership, customer service and motivational skills they learn. Let’s show them a progression pathway that harnesses these skills.

Above all, let’s encourage them to look to the likes of Melissa Power and Paco Gonzalez for their role models, rather than the TikTok influencers.

The payback will be significant, both for us and for them.

Uffe A. Olesen

CEO, Body Bike International A/S



06 **Brett Sutton**
Indoor cycling is far from dead at Les Mills New Zealand, says its CEO. In fact, it's part of the 'boutique in a box' strategy that's driving the brand's success.

20 **Melissa Power**
TikTok, Instagram and the cult of the superstar instructor have been bad news for indoor cycling; it's time to fight back, says the founder of MPowered and Cadence.

30 **Bumps on bikes**
What are the benefits and practical considerations of indoor cycling during and after pregnancy? Dr Lou Atkinson shares her expert advice.

40 **Paco Gonzalez**
The legendary master trainer turned education expert has enjoyed a decades-long love affair with indoor cycling. He offers his advice to the next generation of instructors.



50 *The power of visible effort*

If you want to motivate those new to exercise, let them see their effort data while they're working out. Karen Tejedor Bowen shares her research.

62 *Scent-sational*

Signe Fjord has combined indoor cycling with aromatherapy to create a concept she calls Aroma Bike, adding new layers of experience to every class.

CONTENT & CONTRIBUTIONS

Do you have a great indoor cycling story you'd like to share? From studio successes to new innovations – and everything in between – we're keen to showcase best practice in indoor cycling from around the world. So if there are any topics you think we should cover, please let us know!

ALL IDEAS ARE WELCOME

– info@ridehighmagazine.com

BRETT

SUTTON

Indoor cycling is far from dead at Les Mills New Zealand, says its CEO. In fact, it's part of the 'boutique in a box' strategy that's driving the brand's success. He speaks to Kate Cracknell.

WHAT DOES LES MILLS NZ STAND FOR?

With 12 clubs across the country, Les Mills New Zealand isn't the largest player in the market, but our 95 per cent prompted brand awareness is the highest of any fitness brand in New Zealand and our membership is as big, or bigger, than others in the market with 50+ clubs.

Our clear purpose gives us meaning and salience in the market. We exist to make humans fit for life, with a vision of being the world's best fitness engine. We focus on four measurable pillars – join, train, stay, rave – and throughout our team, there's a culture of showing up and connecting with members.

Research shows us to be the perceived market leader in terms of equipment and facilities, quality of group fitness instructors and personal trainers. In fact, group fitness is a major USP generally: 55 per cent of all club attendances are for group fitness, our instructors are world-class and our large studios – as large as 800sq m in ▶



“We’re connected by one family that’s truly driven by the purpose of fitness. It makes this a very special place to work”

Brett Sutton became CEO of Les Mills NZ in 2022



- ▶ Auckland City – welcome crowds of like-minded people who inspire each other. We're obsessive about the club environment. The look, the feel, the smell, the sound... it must all come together to deliver an uplifting state change the moment you walk in. And we continue to innovate and redefine what big box means. 'Boutique in a box', for example, has elevated the experience and inspired members to try something new.

There's also a great culture within this New Zealand-born business. I'd always aspired to work for Les Mills and I love it. Everyone feels so connected to each other and to the vision.

It all adds up to a great product that's also great value. We know people will come and go throughout their lives, but if we enter someone's life early and provide strong, memorable support on their fitness journey, they will come back.

Above: The immersive screen is used in all cycle classes at the Auckland City club

Right: The Auckland City immersive cycle studio has 85 BODY BIKES

WHAT'S YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH LMI?

We have a pretty special sister company relationship with Les Mills International, with both sides of the business majority owned by the Mills family.

We have different purposes and objectives – Les Mills New Zealand is bricks and mortar clubs, Les Mills International is programme design – but we're connected by one family that's truly driven by the purpose of fitness and that's deeply invested in every way: spiritually, physically, financially. I believe both sides of the business feel that in a unique way, which makes this ▶

“The boutique experience is something we’ve really invested in. Had we not done it, I don’t think the business would be where it is now.”





PHOTO: @HOLLY SARAH BURGESS

► a very special place to work. We always know who we are doing it for and why.

Les Mills International (LMI) programmes dominate the timetables at all our clubs, making up about 98 per cent of all classes. LMI also uses our clubs to pilot new concepts, meaning ideas can be tested quickly and, if they aren't going to work, fail fast. Not everything can be a success, but there's an exciting appetite across both sides of the business to explore, innovate, move and create new things.

The LMI innovation team is inspired by global trends, but we're also part of the conversation, increasingly approaching LMI to design programmes we believe our members would like or to help fine-tune the offering in a particular studio.

TELL US ABOUT 'BOUTIQUE IN A BOX'.

The boutique experience is something we've really invested in since we came out of COVID. The innovation has been world-class and I believe pivotal to our continued





Above: Instructor-led THE TRIP classes account for 9 per cent of all club attendances across the Les Mills NZ estate

“We obsess over sound quality. It has to feel like you’re at a concert. It has to make you want to be there.”



► success; had we not done it, I don't think the business would be where it is now.

Our immersive cycle experience – with its 25m-wide screen, dark lighting and incredible sound system – includes THE TRIP®, SPRINT and RPM. We also have Progressive Cycle in Auckland, a new programme we're testing with LMI.

CEREMONY® is our functional, athletic training boutique – an F45 type of workout, but really beautifully curated and with great attention to detail around music, lighting and the environment in general. We've focused on how people feel within the workout. It's gone absolutely gangbusters; where it exists in our clubs, 36+ per cent of members have attended a CEREMONY.

CONQUER® is our boxing-based boutique experience, where similar to CEREMONY we use spotlights and darkness to create a mood and sense of anonymity. You focus on yourself and get into your own workout with your own bag.

Across all three – across all our group fit studios, in fact – we obsess over sound quality, with an in-house AV specialist ensuring it feels immersive, rich, balanced, inspiring, uplifting and with great base. It has to feel like you're at a concert. It has to make you want to be there.

Auckland City – our 6,500sq m flagship – is the only club that has all our offerings, but we're rolling out our boutiques wherever we can. In the space of two- ►

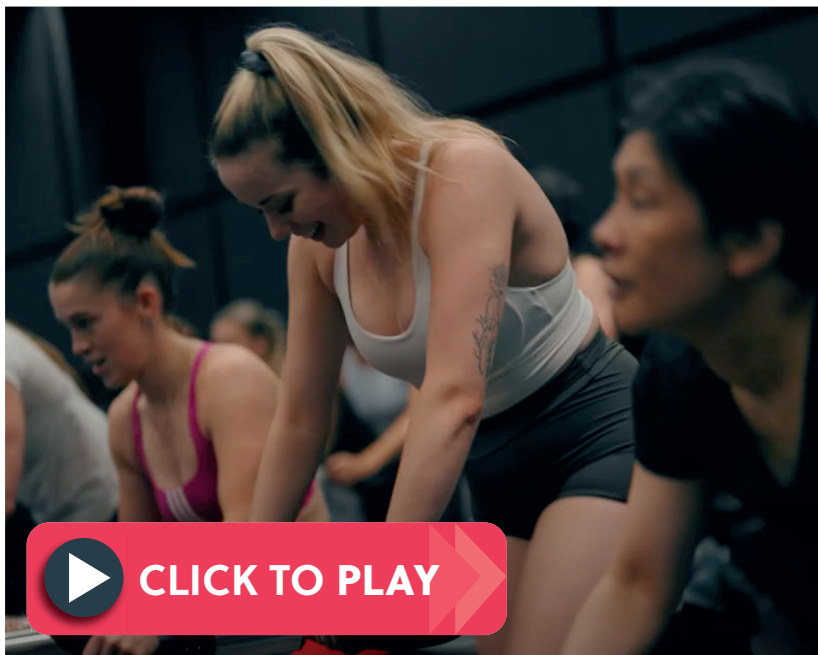


Above: SHAPES was a Limited Edition release, but remains on the timetable due to demand

Top right: CEREMONY has gone 'gangbusters', says Sutton

Middle right: Even non-boutique GX concepts enjoy large studio spaces and high levels of participation

Bottom right: Take a drone tour around the 6,500sq m Auckland City flagship



► and-a-half years, we've gone from one to five clubs with CEREMONY and three to nine clubs with immersive cycling, with plans to roll it out to the other three.

Our new club in Dunedin, which opened last year, is a great example of the impact of 'boutique in a box'. There are some lovely touches at this club, which was curated to really nurture a sense of community, but it surpassed its two-year targets within four months. CEREMONY and THE TRIP have unquestionably driven that performance.

Big box is not dead. Boutique studios don't instantly have an advantage around community. You just have to listen to members so you know what will move the dial.

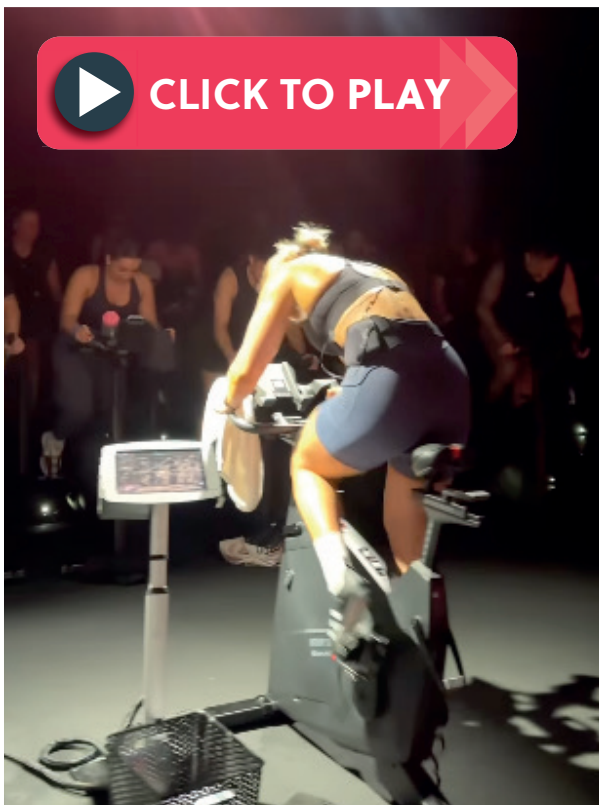
HOW POPULAR IS INDOOR CYCLING?

When I speak to operators in the US and Australia, I hear the same old rhetoric: that indoor cycling is dying. The pandemic likely played a role: people used indoor bikes at home and now it's almost a case of PTSD if they try and do the same workouts as during those tough times.



Above: Les Mills CEREMONY is a hugely popular athletic training boutique experience

Left: Group exercise draws crowds of like-minded people who inspire each other





**“Big box is not dead.
You just have to listen to
members so you know
what will move the dial.”**

However, we simply aren't seeing this decline at our clubs, where indoor cycling has a constant presence among our top five programmes and accounts for 15 per cent of all club attendances.

In January 2024, the top five programmes across our 12 clubs combined were CEREMONY, BODYPUMP, THE TRIP, SPRINT AND RPM. In May [the latest data at the time of doing this interview], it was CEREMONY, THE TRIP, CONQUER, SHAPES and SPRINT. Cycling is absolutely holding its own.

THE TRIP is the hero, though, and central to the continued success of cycling at our clubs. It accounts for 9 per cent of all club

attendances and draws a broad audience. If you add off-peak virtual TRIP classes – without an instructor and using only one-third of the screen – that figure is almost 10 per cent.

Focusing just on Auckland City, in May we delivered 210 instructor-led cycle classes and 112 off-peak virtual cycling classes, with double the number of THE TRIP classes compared to SPRINT and RPM.

We have 85 BODY BIKES in that Auckland studio and for peak time classes in May, THE TRIP had an attendance level of 80+ per cent of capacity, while SPRINT achieved 70+ per cent. Several classes in both categories of cycle reached capacity over the period. ▶



► **WHAT'S THE SECRET OF THIS SUCCESS?**

There are a few important factors, starting with our investment in immersive environments: all our clubs that have immersive cycle studios perform better than those that don't.

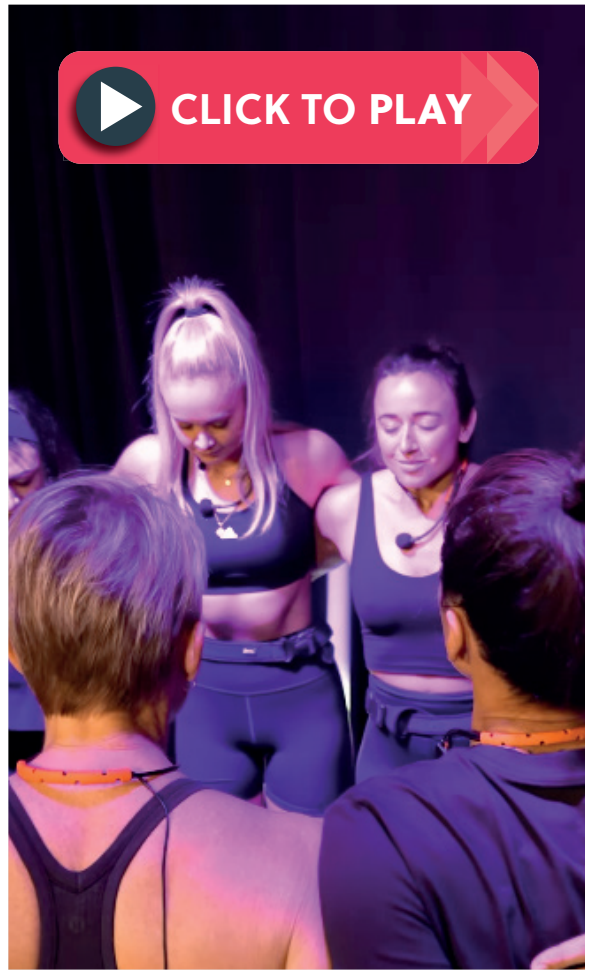
Take Taranaki Street as an example. It used to do 300–350 rides a week. Now, with an immersive studio, it does 1,200–1,300. The immersive screen is used in all classes, not just THE TRIP; in RPM and SPRINT, it's used to project colours or images and create a mood.

The quality of our music curation is another big one, as is the quality of our instructors. LMI's cycle programme director [Glen Ostergaard](#) still instructs classes in Auckland, for example. That's aspirational for other instructors, who challenge themselves to be as good. It creates other champions.

And crucially, we keep checking in to make sure cycling is still delivering. We don't ever take for granted that our investment will continue to pay back. We are endlessly obsessive about the music, the environment, the delivery.



PHOTO: @HOLLY SARAH BURGESS



[CLICK TO PLAY](#)

Above: The culture and sense of community is strong at Les Mills New Zealand

Left: "All our clubs that have immersive cycle studios perform better than those that don't," says Sutton

"Indoor cycling has a constant presence among our top five programmes and accounts for 15 per cent of all club attendances"

Progressive Cycle is a good example of our continued innovation: a new programme where, rather than up and down, sprint and climb, you sit in the burn with continued resistance for longer periods. The music is also different from our other cycle programmes. It's in pilot at Auckland City, with two classes on the timetable each week, and it's delivering impressive numbers so far.

ANY OTHER TRENDS YOU'RE EXPLORING?

Wellness and mind-body is an important one. LMI's pilates-inspired workout





“THE TRIP is central to the continued success of cycling at our clubs. It accounts for 9 per cent of all club attendances.”

Above: Glen Ostergaard (centre, in a cap) leads events around the world, but he still instructs classes at the Auckland club

Left: CONQUER is a boxing-based boutique experience

► SHAPES has already gone gangbusters in our clubs. Created as part of a new Limited Edition series, there was outcry from our members when we took it off the timetable; we had to put it back on again. The other Limited Edition category, Strength Development, is also proving popular.

Then there's recovery; we're already exploring ways to service our members without making it too much of a niche offering. The answer is likely to be hot-cold spaces – sauna and cold plunge – within our changing rooms.

I'm also really excited by the prospect of exploring our customer journey and rebuilding it using human-centred design. We're already asking our members about the moments that matter to them. We cannot assume we know what they want: we have to ask. And we have to really, really listen to what they say. ●

 @lesmillsnz

 @lmnzmarketing

MELISSA POWER

TikTok, Instagram and the cult of the superstar instructor have been bad news for indoor cycling, says the founder of MPowered and Cadence. She tells Kate Cracknell why she's leading a movement to fight back.

When did you discover indoor cycling?

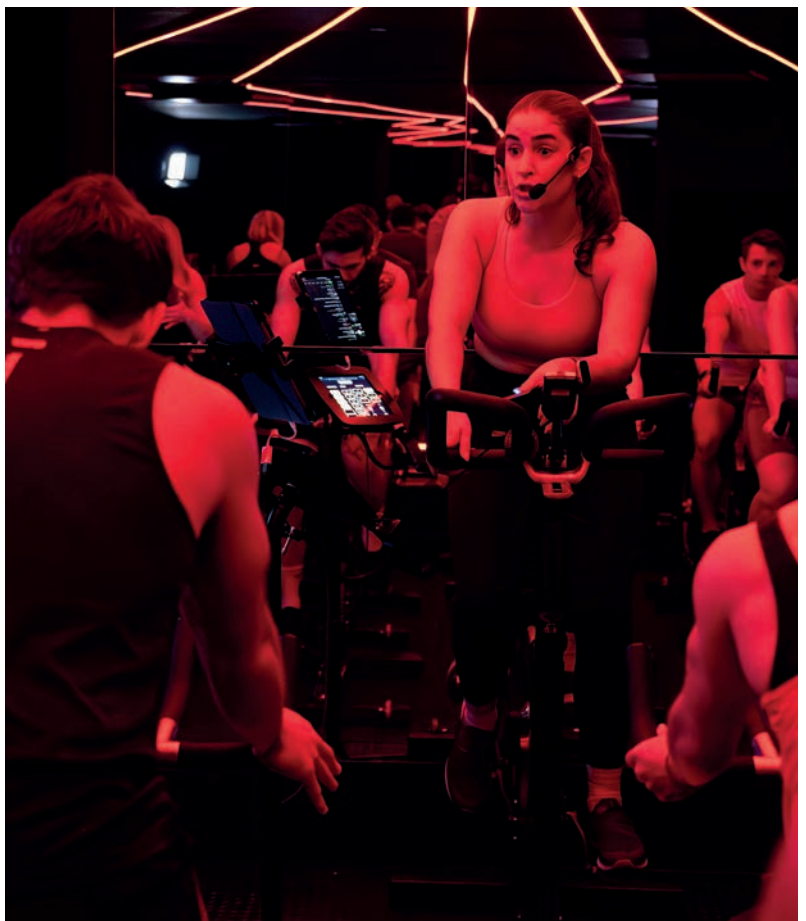
I started teaching around 17 years ago. I'd never really been into exercise, but I had a road traffic accident where I was knocked off my bike and I used indoor cycling to recover and get my strength back. I loved it and certified as an instructor within a year.

Initially I taught in the evenings alongside a day job in TV and radio, but I soon found myself living for the teaching so I quit my TV job. I knew I had to fully commit.

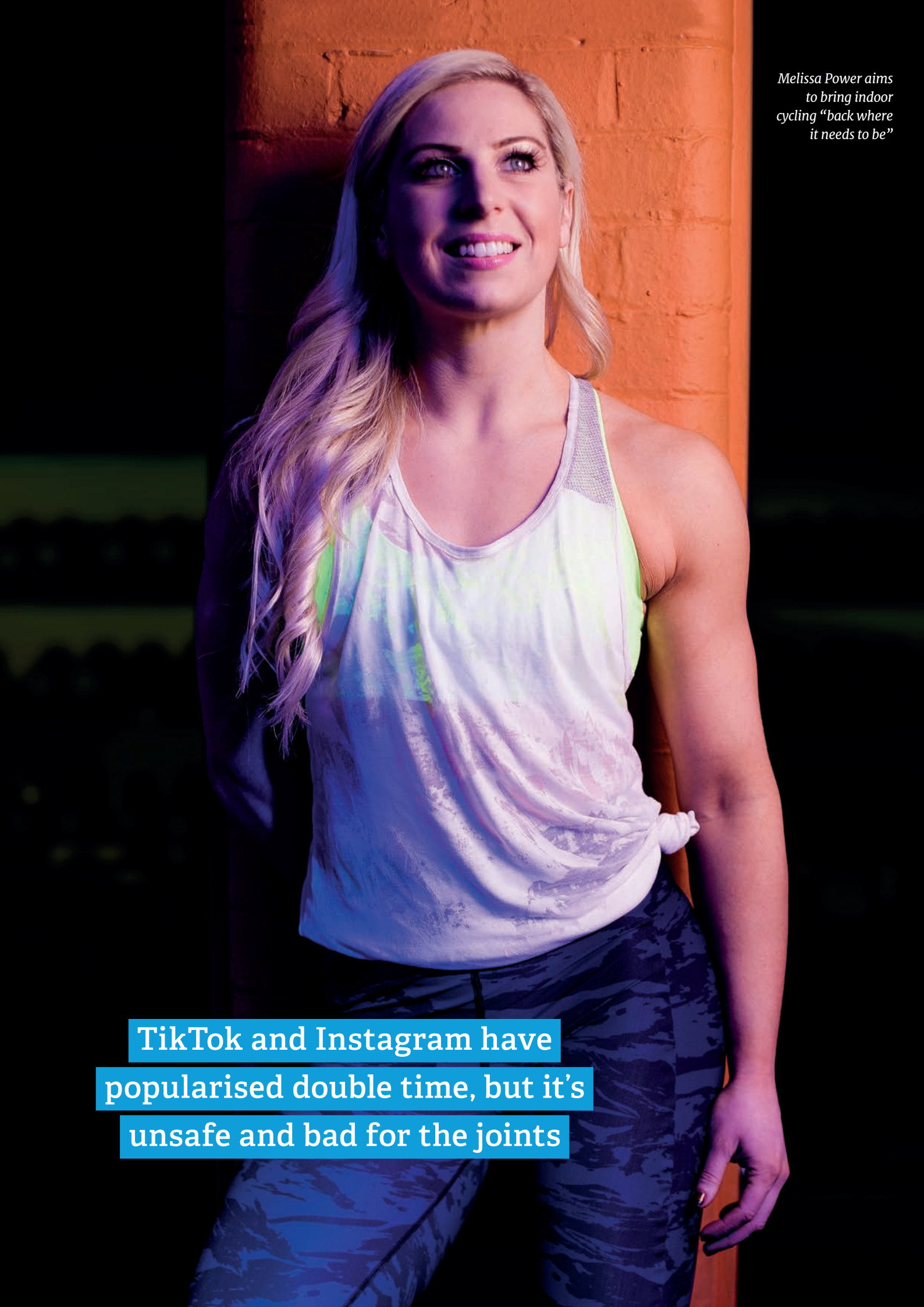
I went around London trying out all the gyms. I did lots of classes, got to know the master trainers and wrote to the clubs I loved to secure teaching spots. It became a full-time passion for me and I ultimately became a master trainer myself.

You then became a training provider...

It was 2017 by this point. I began to notice a lot of people coming into the industry who didn't really know what they were doing. They had out-of-date or more generalist qualifications and while they could put on a performance, they lacked a basic understanding of the science of cycling.



► Above: Cadence has the “best team of instructors in London”, says Power



Melissa Power aims to bring indoor cycling "back where it needs to be"

TikTok and Instagram have popularised double time, but it's unsafe and bad for the joints



Above: Cadence helps people “fall in love with indoor cycling again”

Too often these days, attending a class is about buying a ticket to a show. It's giving indoor cycling a bad name.

All images (right): Every class at Cadence is modified around who's in the room, so everyone leaves feeling positive



- ▶ They'd equate speed with a higher RPM, for example, rather than turning up the resistance. They'd direct participants to go on 'vibes' rather than telling them what gears to use; can you imagine letting someone pick up whatever weight they felt like on the gym floor? In many cases, the bike was incidental – no more than a prop on which to perform their choreography.

And so I decided to write my own indoor cycling certification, focusing first on teaching people to instruct safely – with a real knowledge and understanding of cycling – before adding musicality and choreography.

I'd been instructing for a long time by this point, but crucially I had never stopped learning, immersing myself in all the research and science I could find. Even so, designing and writing the certification was harder than writing my dissertation! It's not just the content you have to create but also the delivery, lesson plans, programming structure, all the little details and tips.

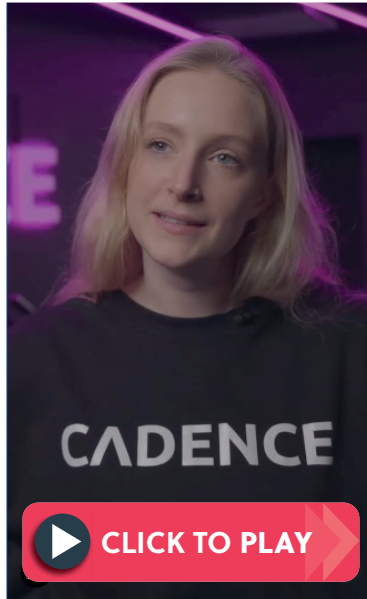
I also constantly evolve and add to it: it's amazing how much it's changed since I first launched it in September 2018. It's effectively a masterclass now, with learnings for all instructors no matter how experienced they are; we've had master trainers tell us it's all brand new knowledge for them.

We've certified about 600 instructors so far and I'm delighted to say the MPowered Training Academy has a CIMSPA rating of Enhancing, its highest level of accreditation.

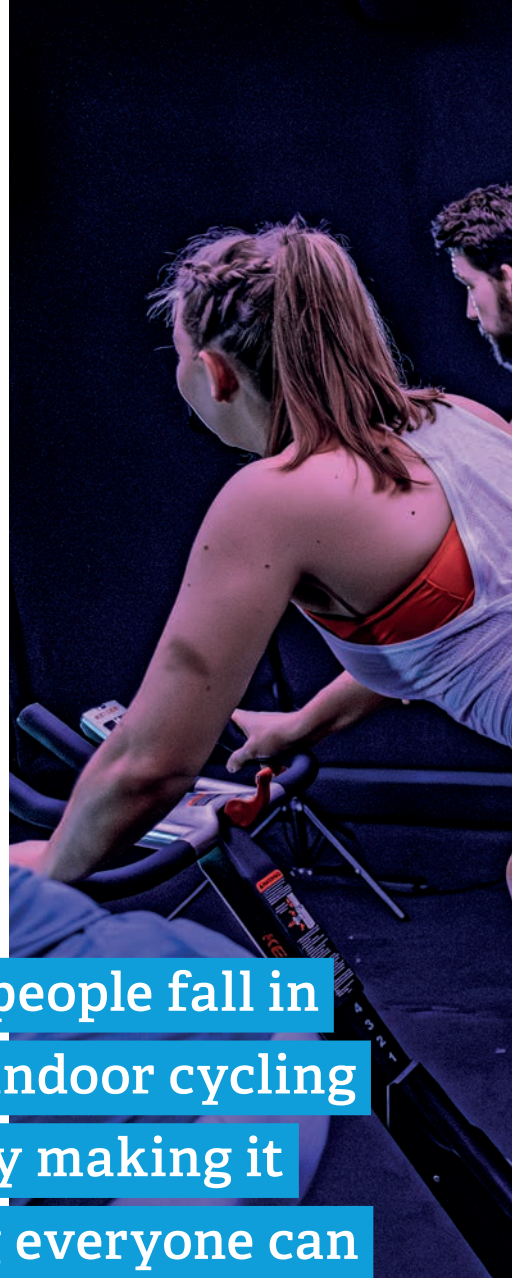
What's different about your approach?

There are two main things going on in the world of indoor cycling that I'm fighting against, both through MPowered and our new Cadence studio, which opened in October 2023.





Above: True superstars are defined by their empathy, says Power



We help people fall in
love with indoor cycling
again by making it
something everyone can
do, not just the instructor
and the front row

- ▶ The first is unsafe riding, by which I'm primarily referring to anything above 105 RPM. TikTok and Instagram have popularised double time, but it's unsafe and bad for the joints. It might be very video-able, but members can't keep up with it. Even instructors... I've had so many on my course tell me what a relief our approach is, because they can't do the choreography some studios are asking for. We believe that simplicity is sophistication. We teach people to instruct safely, removing the complex choreography and showing them new ways to make a workout exciting. The second thing I'm fighting against is the way indoor cycling has become all about the superstar instructor. Of course you want a great instructor, but what actually defines 'great' is how they make participants feel. It absolutely isn't about using class to show off what they can do: double time, one-handed choreography and so on. Too often these days, attending an indoor cycling class is about buying a ticket to a show. It's giving indoor cycling a bad name. So much so that at Cadence, we aren't only competing with other studios and other leisure activities, but are also having to persuade people to give indoor cycling another chance after their negative experiences elsewhere.

Tell us more about Cadence.

We help people fall in love with indoor cycling again by making it something everyone can do, not just the instructor and the front row. We make everyone feel welcome. The reviews say it all. We're getting so many comments along the lines of "I never thought I'd enjoy indoor cycling again", while *Time Out* said: "Cadence is doing things differently. If indoor cycling scares you, this is the place to start." It hasn't been without its challenges. We did it all ourselves – my partner Chris and I – with no investment other



Above: Cadence classes are “designed scientifically but delivered accessibly”

Left: “Everything we teach, everyone can do” is the ethos at Cadence, says Power



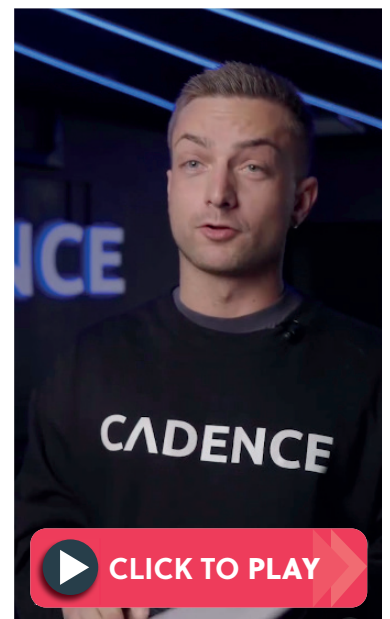
I've worked out the exact cadences that different types of training should be ridden at to achieve the best results



Left: Power always dreamt of having her own cycle studio

Right: Cadence Karaoke is a hugely popular singalong class

Below: Light-hearted social posts reflect the welcoming culture at Cadence





► than my life savings. We found out I was pregnant the day we signed the lease. And we simply hadn't anticipated the total market dominance of ClassPass. We've had to sign up and we're getting regular riders through the platform, but the payments we receive are still so low, even for high-demand classes.

Nevertheless, I'd always dreamt of having my own studio – building a community around my ethos of 'everything we teach, everyone can do' – and that's what we're doing.

Located in the residential north London area of Crouch End, ours is a small studio of 14 bikes. It doesn't

have posh changing rooms, but it does have the best team of instructors in London, all of whom have come through MPowered, then the Cadence Academy.

I compare Cadence to a Michelin-starred restaurant, where people go for the high-quality food prepared by top chefs rather than for the surroundings. At Cadence, people come for the quality of the classes delivered by fantastic instructors.

Tell us about your programming.

Our programmes are designed scientifically but delivered accessibly. We modify around the individuals in the room and give options so everyone leaves feeling





Above: Cadence is a small local studio with a strong sense of community

The best indoor cycling classes are the worst ones to put on TikTok... We can't let indoor cycling become a fad.

- positive. Even when I was two days from giving birth and honestly pretty uncomfortable, I was able to do our classes.

Our Signature workouts are fun and accessible for all levels – a combination of rhythm and power, using choreography mostly as a break from power. We don't explain it in this scientific way, but we might have a three-minute power track at threshold, then a two-and-a-half-minute choreography track in the aerobic zone, then maybe a minute of VO₂ max.

I won't give away our secret sauce, but I've worked out the exact cadences that different types of training should be ridden at to achieve the best results. It's why we always design the programme first, then create the playlist. It's very hard to do it this

way round, but the music has to support the exact cadences we need. It makes me a nightmare to watch TV with: I'm forever pausing programmes to Shazam the music!

Zones is our more technical, performance-focused ride, but we still teach it accessibly.

And then there's Cadence Karaoke, which is great fun but also rooted in science. There's a reason why Taylor Swift trained for her *Eras* tour by singing the full three-hour set while running on a treadmill: singing while exercising has been shown to significantly improve stamina, fitness and aerobic capacity.

In Cadence Karaoke, we alternate between one pure cycling track, then an easier track where we sing while we cycle. It's a labour of love, as every class takes hours to prepare: the programming, music selection, creating



the video and lyrics for the big screen. But it's an amazing experience and hugely popular.

What's next for you?

We launched our Academy internationally in mid-July, with the first course set to take place in Dubai in November. New York, Toronto, Berlin, Amsterdam and Barcelona will follow.

We dream of taking the MPowered method globally. We see it as a movement, building an army of people who will bring indoor cycling back to where it needs to be.

We'd also like to expand Cadence, starting in London and then potentially internationally.

What's your advice to the sector?

The best indoor cycling classes are the worst ones to put on TikTok. We need to scrap double time and complex choreography to focus on safety and simplicity. We need to put power back in the mix so it isn't just dancing on a bike. We can't let indoor cycling become a fad.

I'd also like to see the demise of the superstar instructor, so members are paying for a class, not a show. It's fine for members to admire an instructor, but it should be because that instructor has come over to help them set up, made them feel comfortable, seen who's in class and offered alternatives so everyone can do the workout. True superstars are defined by their empathy, not their performance. ●

 @m.powered

 @cadence.indoor.cycling



Above: Power dreams of taking the MPowered method globally, as well as expanding Cadence

Left: Double time is banned at Cadence, where safe workouts are delivered with a sense of fun

PHOTO © SHUTTERSTOCK/MARIDAV

BUMPS on bikes

What are the benefits and practical considerations of indoor cycling during and after pregnancy? Dr Lou Atkinson shares her expert advice.

Left: Indoor cycling is a good choice for all trimesters

Right: Dr Lou Atkinson is a pre- and post-natal indoor cycling expert

“When discussing exercise during pregnancy, and indoor cycling specifically, it’s good to break things down by trimester,” says Dr Lou Atkinson, Schwinn master trainer and pre- and post-natal indoor cycling expert.

“Obviously every pregnancy and every body is different, but different things happen physiologically at different points in a pregnancy – and the good news is that indoor cycling is pretty much the perfect answer to all these changes.”

1st trimester

“Almost immediately in the first trimester, hormones kick in to loosen the blood vessels. However, it takes a while for the volume of blood to catch up and fill them again. The result is vascular underfill, which can cause tiredness, nausea and light-headedness; there isn’t enough blood taking oxygen to muscles around the body.

“Especially if you’re used to working out at a relatively high intensity, you can notice a big change in your performance – often before you even



know you’re pregnant – with your body not responding in the way it normally does.

“Indoor cycling is good in this trimester, because you can easily adjust the intensity without anyone else noticing. You’re already sitting down if you start to feel light-headed, too, and can easily stop and take a breather without getting in anyone’s way.”

2nd trimester

“In the second trimester, blood vessels and blood volume should be back in sync, giving some people a burst of energy. However, the hormone relaxin loosens the joints, which you do need to be a bit cautious about. Joints may go through a greater range of motion during activity, putting additional strain on the surrounding tissues.

“Postural changes also start to take effect as the bump develops and the pelvis tilts forward. This can cause lower back pain and compensation throughout the body – including neck and shoulders – as well as additional weight through the legs.

“Again, indoor cycling is a great option. As a fixed and uni-directional pattern of movement with no impact, you’re unlikely to move your joints past the point you normally would – plus it’s simple to master even when you have baby brain! ▶

“Indoor cycling is good in the first trimester: you can easily adjust the intensity without anyone else noticing”



Left: Assuming there are no medical complications, it's safe and beneficial to be active while pregnant

Right: From around 20 weeks pregnant, the general advice is to spend more time in the saddle

- ▶ "You're also sitting down, taking the weight off your legs and feet. And you can adjust the bike set-up around your changing body: lifting the handlebars makes space for the bump and reduces the strain on core muscles by raising the angle of the body. "From around 20 weeks, as you get bigger and the baby starts to move around more, the general advice is to spend more time in the saddle, both from a stability perspective and for the sake of the joints. But of course, that's an individual choice."

3rd trimester

"In the third trimester, pregnant women should be treated as if hypertensive. That said, small modifications such as limiting exercise with arms overhead will suffice in most cases. After all, exercise can also help maintain optimal blood pressure.

"There's now even more weight gain, exacerbating the postural changes, and it's really important not to bump the bump.

"So, indoor cycling still works well. Our advice is that you can keep cycling for as



“Lifting the handlebars makes space for the bump and reduces the strain on core muscles”

long as the bump fits in without touching any of the bike’s protruding parts.”

Is it really safe to cycle?

“It’s important to attend regular antenatal checks to ensure there are no medical issues – such as pre-eclampsia or very high blood pressure – that mean you shouldn’t exercise. Assuming there are no such complications, it’s safe to be physically active and indoor cycling is a great option for all the reasons we’ve already mentioned. ▶



- ▶ “The overall guidelines are now very clear, with two main pieces of advice.
“If you exercised regularly before you were pregnant, it’s fine to keep going, aiming for the usual 150 minutes’ moderate activity a week. Do also recognise that less is still beneficial and more is also fine if you’re used to it and it feels good.
“If you weren’t regularly active before, it’s fine to start during pregnancy and there are huge benefits of doing so, both for yourself and your baby. But start slowly, perhaps 15 minutes of low to medium intensity, and build up.
“The only things that are really contraindicated during pregnancy are extreme heat – hot yoga, outdoor runs in the heat of the day, swimming pools above body temperature – and anything that could cause trauma to the bump through contact, collision or falling. Most women self-regulate as far as these risks go, which is fine provided they understand

what the risks are. It’s why the *Get active questionnaire for pregnancy* is such a good tool (see Additional Resources, page 37).

“Rather than the old approach where alarms would go off the moment a PAR-Q found a member was pregnant, this new approach sees women complete their own questionnaire to discuss with their healthcare professional. It gives each individual the information they need to understand their own risks and make an informed decision, instead of being told ‘yes’ or ‘no’ based on a few tick boxes.

“That’s great, because once contraindications are ruled out, women can be confidently active while pregnant. There’s no evidence of any increased risk of things like miscarriage, stillbirth, preterm labour or limited growth of the baby. The risks really are hugely outweighed by the benefits.”

What are the benefits?

“Being physically active while pregnant reduces the risk of a number of possible

“As a coach, you have a balance to strike between duty of care and respecting everyone’s right to make their own choices”

Left: Help the individual understand what they want from class, says Atkinson

Below: Start slow if you weren’t already active before your pregnancy

negative outcomes. On a day-to-day basis throughout your pregnancy, you’ll sleep better and suffer less discomfort from things like back pain and varicose veins. You’re less likely to need an emergency C-section or assisted birth and more likely to have a shorter labour with a vaginal birth. You’re less likely to suffer from post-natal depression and your baby is less likely to be large for its gestational age, in turn reducing the risk of conditions such as obesity in later life.”

What about post-natal cycling?

“With plenty of relaxin still in the body, indoor cycling remains a great option for the joints. If you have heavy breasts from breastfeeding, indoor cycling is also more comfortable than some other activities as you don’t move around too much. Plus simple moves are always good if you’re sleep-deprived and have brain fog!

“The guidelines in the UK are to wait until your six-week post-natal check before you do any structured exercise – walking is great in the meantime – or 12 weeks if you’ve had a C-section. When you do start, build up



► slowly, listen to your body and be kind to yourself. If there's any pain, stop. If you're taking more than a day or two to recover, you've probably gone too hard, too fast.

"Your posture on the bike may still be different from how it was before you were pregnant, so take time on the set-up and ensure you feel supported. If the saddle isn't comfortable, give it another week or two.

"Remember you're still working with a healing body – one that's potentially significantly and even permanently different from your pre-pregnancy body."

What's your advice to coaches?

"Don't be scared if someone tells you they're pregnant. It's a normal, natural part of life in which being active brings huge benefits and limited risks that are easily managed in an indoor cycling class.

"Help the individual understand what they want from class and take that onboard so you can support them. It will generally be less about fitness goals and more about staying healthy, mental wellbeing and what's good for them and the baby. Encourage them to focus on this. Let them know that even shorter, less frequent, less intense workouts are still great. Let them know it's OK if they want to leave after 20 minutes, especially while they're slowly building up to doing more. Direct them to take the bike near the air conditioning unit and to drink plenty of water.

"It's more tricky when someone who's used to being fit doesn't appear to be



PHOTO © SHUTTERSTOCK/BLACKDAY

Above: In the first trimester, vascular underfill can cause tiredness before you even know you are pregnant

"Being active brings huge benefits and limited risks that are easily managed in an indoor cycling class"



self-regulating, pushing themselves as hard as they've ever done. As a coach, you have a balance to strike between duty of care and respecting everyone's right to make their own choices.

"One tip is to reassure them that they won't lose a huge amount of fitness by slowing down for a few months. You can also explain how relaxin stays in the body for a while after pregnancy – especially if they breastfeed – and how this can give a post-partum performance boost to help them get back into it. ▶

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ Dr Lou Atkinson is available to deliver workshops on pre- and post-natal indoor cycling for gyms and instructor teams. Find her on Instagram: [@getmefitlou](#)
- ▶ Exercise and Physical Activity During Pregnancy and Postpartum – [a book of evidence-based guidelines](#) (e-book and single chapters also available to purchase)
- ▶ Active Pregnancy Foundation [resources library](#)
- ▶ [Get active questionnaire for pregnancy](#) – forms & guidance (UK versions)
- ▶ CIMSPA-accredited [free e-learning module](#) suitable for health and exercise professionals

► “Standard good practice also applies here. If your normal approach is to offer options and modifications in class, that will benefit pregnant participants. Getting to know every participant as an individual also means private conversations can be had in the studio without it seeming strange.

“That’s crucial, because if someone tells you about their pregnancy in the early stages – seeking your advice and support to stay safe and comfortable – it’s a huge privilege and a secret to keep. I’ve had women tell me about

pregnancies before they’ve even told their families. This is not your information to share in any way, but it is a wonderful opportunity to reassure them of their safety and how normal it is for their body to do strange things!”

How about post-natal coaching?

“Most of these women will now have different priorities, so treat everyone as an individual. Many of those who used to focus on achieving maximum fitness will now exercise to be healthy so they can be a good

Physical activity for women after childbirth (birth to 12 months)

- Time for yourself - reduces worries and depression
- Helps to control weight and return to pre-pregnancy weight
- Improves tummy muscle tone and strength
- Improves fitness
- Improves mood
- Improves sleep

Not active? Start gradually

Active before? Restart gradually

Out and about

Leisure

Home

Start pelvic floor exercises as soon as you can and continue daily

Build back up to muscle strengthening activities twice a week

aim for at least
150 minutes
of moderate intensity activity every week

It's safe to be active. No evidence of harm for post partum women

Depending on your delivery listen to your body and start gently

You can be active while breastfeeding

UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines, 2019

Left: After childbirth, listen to your still-healing body, urges Atkinson

Above right: Most pregnant women will prioritise wellbeing over fitness



parent; to feel in control of their body again; and to support their mental wellbeing.

"They will likely be looking to connect with the person they were and still are. Encourage them to enjoy this adult 'me time' and reassure them that they don't have to be straight back on top of the leaderboard.

"Crucially, I strongly advise avoiding cues that refer to pre-pregnancy bodies or

getting back into that old pair of jeans. It's psychologically damaging and sets women up for failure. Many will never have the same body again. They need to know that's OK."

What's your advice for clubs?

"As a facility, it can be hard to justify dedicated 'bumps on bikes' classes, especially at the peak times most women will want: they're likely to still be working during the day and too tired to come at 8.00pm.

"And as I say, these are still normal adults who just happen to be pregnant. A mainstream indoor cycling class is perfectly safe for them.

"However, pregnant women often tell me they'd ideally like to be in a class with other pregnant women, run by a specialist coach – to be among those who really understand them. If as a club you can find a way to make this work commercially, it would definitely be the ideal scenario for the women." ●

"These are still normal adults who just happen to be pregnant. A mainstream indoor cycling class is perfectly safe for them."

 @getmefitlou



Paco Gonzalez first came across indoor cycling in 1997

PACO GONZALEZ

The legendary master trainer turned education expert has enjoyed a decades-long love affair with indoor cycling. He offers his advice to the next generation of instructors

Paco, how did you first discover indoor cycling?

I used to be a bodybuilder, competing nationally and internationally, so it used to be all about weights for me. That was also the focus of my gym in Tenerife, which I opened in 1992.

Even in other gyms, there wasn't much of a group exercise scene in those days. You had aerobics and that was about it.

I first came across indoor cycling in 1997, when I visited a bodybuilding show in the US. There was a small trade show on the side, where Johnny G was promoting Spinning and leading a few small classes. I was fascinated and instantly knew I wanted it for my gym. At no point did I plan to become an instructor myself, though. I was still all about muscles then!

Returning to Tenerife, I set about creating a dedicated cycling studio in my gym; I'm pretty sure it was the first in the Canaries. I bought 11 bikes, including one for the instructor, from Technosport – the Keiser distributor for Spain – and created a dark space with disco lights.

I instinctively knew I wanted a party atmosphere in the studio. Everyone

knows how to pedal, which gives you the scope to have a bit of fun.

Technosport sent its master trainer, Kim Forteza, to train my team and run a masterclass. He was incredible, opening my eyes to endurance training. I'm living proof that muscle doesn't turn to fat if you keep training!

I still wasn't planning to become an instructor, but at training the next day, there was a spare bike. Kim encouraged me to jump on and the rest is history. ▶

“ It was love at first pedal. There and then, in that first class, I decided to become an indoor cycling instructor. ”



“ I’ve taken classes in more than 65 countries and seen almost everything that’s happened in indoor cycling



Gonzalez puts all his emotions into every class he designs

► It was love at first pedal. There and then, in that first class, I decided to become an indoor cycling instructor.

What's your role now?

I've been with Keiser for 25 years, initially as master trainer, now as Latin American sales and education director and cardio product specialist.

It all started at a fitness convention in 1998. All day, classes were running

late, so attendees who arrived for the session after mine found themselves in my class instead. I was a new instructor, but I had 1,000 people on bikes in front of me. It felt like a big party – and Dennis Keiser was watching.

The short version: that same year, Keiser sent me to Mexico to negotiate a distribution deal and from then on, I travelled the world as the company's master trainer. In the process, I've taken classes in more than ►



- ▶ 65 countries and seen almost everything that's happened in indoor cycling.

One experience that really stands out in my memory was a day spent on top of a mountain in Brazil – at an event called Pedalando no Topo – instructing six classes of 500 people over the course of the day. I did that event every year from 2011–2017. It was fantastic!

How has indoor cycling evolved?

When I started, it really was about the bike and the instructor. Music was also important, but it was tricky: we were working from cassettes and mini-discs. I had an advantage

“ The physical and emotional feeling of teaching a class as an instructor... it's hard to put into words

though: prior to doing a degree in human nutrition and a masters in physiology, my original degree was in media production. I'd never used it, but suddenly I came full circle, putting my knowledge of music mixing and media visuals to good use.

Looking at indoor cycling today, things have changed. It's no longer just about the bike and the instructor, but about the ecosystem and the environment. Classes are smaller, but they're experience-based. Data, technology and connectivity play a major role. Studio design and AV systems are hugely important. You have so many more tools as an instructor now and you have to know how to use them to sell the experience. It's about entertainment, entertainment, entertainment.

The instructor is still important, but very few people are specialist now: there are so many choices when it comes to group exercise nowadays, meaning instructors tend to be good in several disciplines rather than exceptional in one. ▶



Above: Gonzalez shares his wisdom with trainee instructors in Brazil

Left: Pedalando no Topo is an event with great memories for Gonzalez

Below: A good instructor never stops learning, says Gonzalez



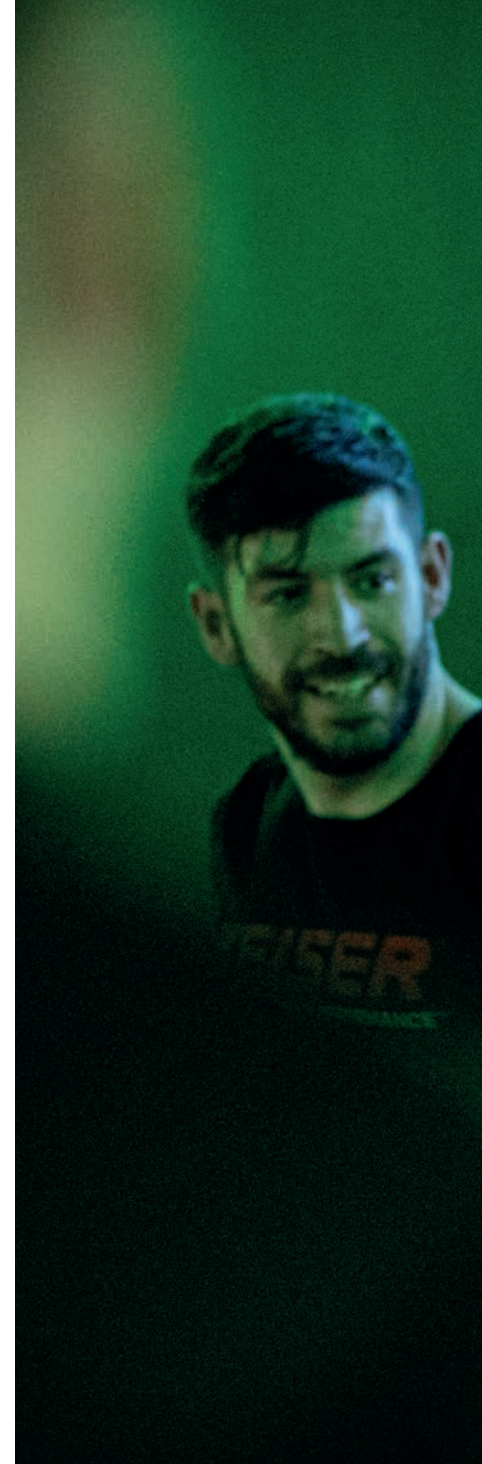
“ Indoor cycling is a group experience, so why don't we embrace that in the way we use data?

► **What makes a great instructor?**

You don't have to be a specialist to be a great instructor, but there are some essentials you must tick off.

If you want participants to enjoy your classes, you have to enjoy them yourself – to visibly thrive off sharing your knowledge and your emotions. You're not going to inspire a passion in others if they don't see you loving what you're doing, although always remember you're there to train the participants, not to train yourself.

That direct contact with riders is certainly the thing I miss most in my role now. The physical and emotional feeling of teaching a class as an instructor... it's hard to put into words and I'm sure I will return to it one day.



Above: Why not use group targets to motivate the whole class, asks Gonzalez

Left: “You're there to help people achieve tangible results – you aren't only there to put a smile on their faces”

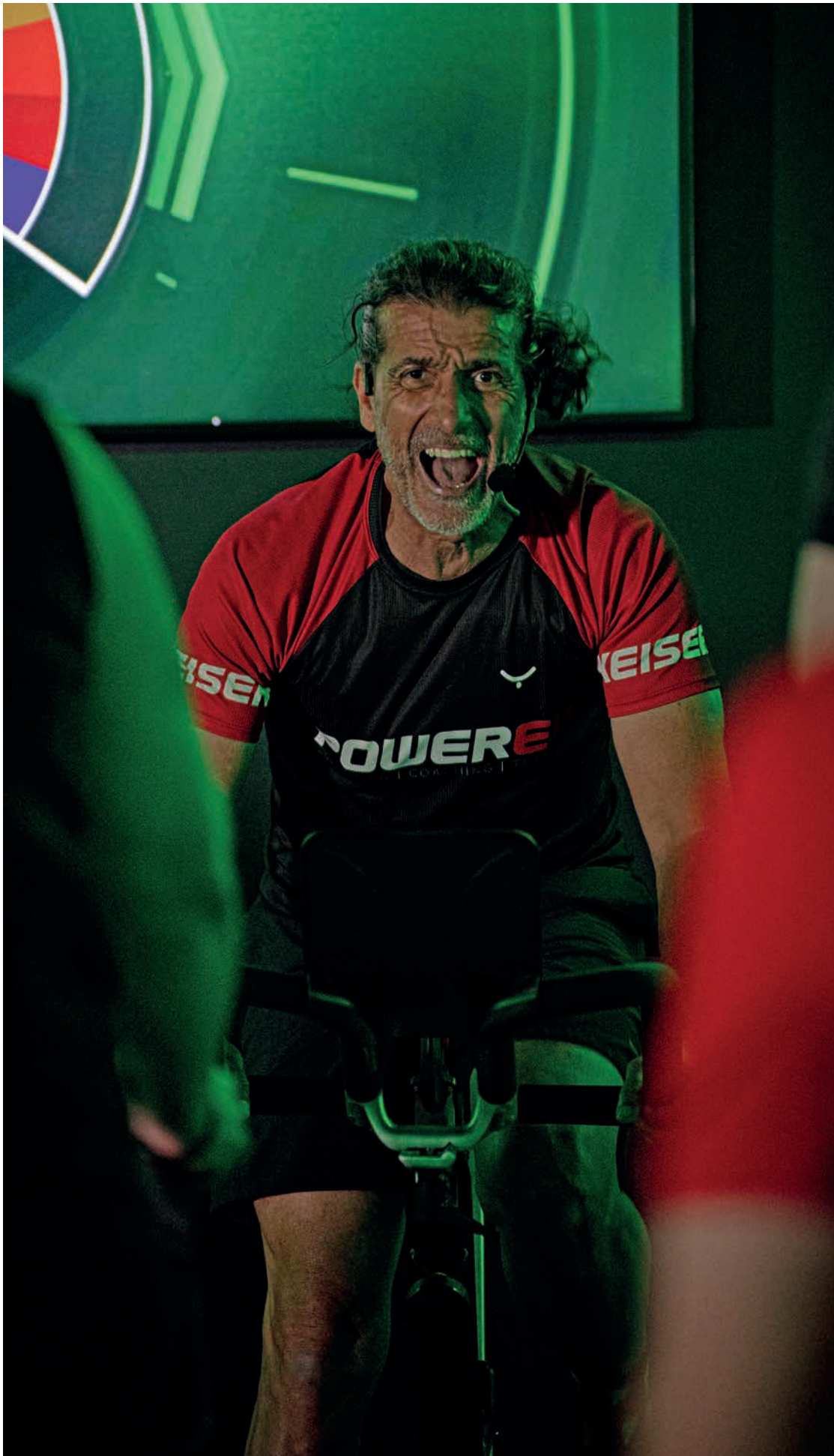


You also have to understand physiology and programming so you can design great classes. Yes, you must deliver an entertaining, enjoyable experience, but you aren't only there to put a smile on people's faces. You're also there to help them achieve tangible physical results.

Of course, there are some excellent pre-choreographed programmes and that's great for generalist trainers who spend their whole day between the gym floor and the studio. Honestly, when do they have time to create their own high-quality programmes and playlists?

However, I personally struggle to use someone else's programmes. When I design a class, I put all my energy and emotions into the workout and the music. That really shows when I come to deliver it. I find it hard to interpret and deliver a class I didn't create.

Perhaps most important of all, however experienced you are as an instructor, you have to keep learning. The day you think you know everything, you know nothing. Every country and city I go to, I do a class as a participant. I take in what the instructor is doing, how they're using music and so on. It's the best way to learn and continually improve. ▶



Left: If you want others to enjoy your classes, you must visibly enjoy them yourself

Right: Pedalando no Topo saw Gonzalez instruct classes on top of a mountain in Brazil



“ Anyone who says indoor cycling is dying doesn’t know what they’re talking about. It’s very much alive.

► **What’s the future of indoor cycling?**

We now live in a data-led world. It’s all about connectivity, with technological innovations and class personalisation transforming the way people connect with indoor cycling.

I’m excited by the use of digital applications and platforms, allowing instructors to offer rides that suitably challenge different skill levels and personal goals within the same class.

That said, I’m not convinced we currently use data in the best way. Do we need to see each individual’s data on a big screen at the front of the class? Indoor cycling is a group experience, so why don’t we embrace that in the way we use data? Why not set a goal for the whole class – generating 10,000 kilojoules of energy to power the studio lighting, for example – and

have that target on the big screen, with everyone working together to achieve it?

I am pleased by the way indoor cycling is becoming more inclusive and accessible, with a growing number of studios adopting online and on-demand classes. Meanwhile, in-person, the supportive community aspect of indoor cycling continues to motivate people around the world, led by instructors who enthuse, inspire and fuel emotions.

One thing is for sure: anyone who says indoor cycling is dying doesn’t know what they’re talking about. It’s very much alive, with markets such as Brazil, Spain and the UK leading the way. ●

 @pacog62



Wearing Myzone belts so everyone's effort data shows on-screen can be a great motivator

THE POWER of visible effort




If you want to motivate those new to exercise, let them see their effort data while they're working out. Karen Tejedor Bowen, lecturer at Leeds University Business School, takes Kate Cracknell through her research.



Above: Karen Tejedor Bowen

PHOTO: © SPORT ENGLAND





“Where there’s no objective measure of performance, everyone judges themselves based on those around them”

► **Tell us about your research.**

After doing my masters in marketing at Leeds University, I worked on the Nike account at an advertising agency. The campaigns were always about training hard and pushing yourself, but I was conscious this message wouldn’t work for everyone. Especially when you first start exercising, it’s about the little wins.

I wanted to explore this further, looking at what messages would help people stick with exercise, especially beginners. I approached Leeds University to do a PhD on the topic of social contexts and their influence on exercise motivation, performance and happiness.

One of my grounding theories was the social comparison theory, which describes how people naturally compare themselves to others – even if not intentionally – in all aspects of life. I wanted to see if this would have an impact on people’s motivation, performance and happiness in a gym-based group exercise environment.

My studies were conducted at the university gym. Although open to the public and academic staff, it meant a high proportion of my study participants were students. This could have influenced the results, as younger people tend to be more affected by social comparison than older people, but I believe we all compare ourselves to others, even as we age. ►

Left: Even if not intentionally, we all naturally compare ourselves to others



Top two images (left): In mixed-level classes, advanced participants are more motivated when there's no effort data...

... but when effort data is shown in these classes, the advanced participants will perform better (lower two images, left)



► What did you measure?

Performance I defined as calories burnt and, where relevant, distance travelled. I wanted to talk the language of the masses rather than using elite performance metrics.

Motivation was measured according to a peer-reviewed academic scale published in the *Journal of Marketing Research*. Participants self-reported how motivated they felt during class, how hard they worked during class and how much effort they put in, giving each a score out of seven.

And then happiness was measured using a peer-reviewed academic scale published in the *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, with participants giving scores out of seven in response to statements such as: 'this class gave me a sense of enjoyment'; 'I felt good while engaged in the class'; and 'I felt happier in this class than in other activities'.

My results stand even when controlling for age, BMI and body image.

What studies did you conduct?

My initial study was based on a one-off indoor cycling class, with participants anonymously categorised as beginners or advanced based on their self-reported indoor cycling experience. Nobody knew about these categories, though.

I then randomly assigned people to one of two cycling classes to look at the impact of group composition on motivation, performance and happiness.

As I say, my main focus was on understanding how to support beginners, so I studied beginners in a beginners-only class, as well as beginners alongside advanced riders in a mixed-level class. We ►



**“Effort visibility effectively erased
the impact of group composition
and lessened the natural decline
in motivation over time”**

Above: Seeing their effort data motivates beginners whether they're in mixed or same-level classes

- ▶ used the same virtual cycling class across both classes for consistency and in the mixed-level class used a chess formation, surrounding each rider with people of a different level from themselves.

The results were fascinating and very much in line with social comparison theory. In the mixed-level class, advanced and beginner riders all cycled a similar distance (11.11 miles and 10.96 miles respectively) and burned a similar number of calories (278.02 kcal and 259.32 kcal). In the beginners-only class, mean performance was far lower for both distance (8.54 miles) and calories (190.39 kcal).

It was a small pilot study of 81 females, but it showed how in an environment where there's no objective measure of

performance, everyone judges themselves based on those around them. In the same-level group, beginners could look around and think: 'I'm doing OK.' In the mixed-level group, they pushed harder to keep up with the more advanced riders.

We also looked at happiness in this study and found that advanced riders were always much happier – understandably, as the experience was something they were comfortable with. However, the difference in beginners' happiness between the two classes was not statistically significant: beginners performed much better in a mixed-level class without feeling significantly less happy than in a same-level class.

These findings led me to move on to a larger longitudinal study where as



PHOTO: @MZONE

Left: With or without data, advanced participants were always happier than beginners

Above right: Where no data is shown, beginners perform better in mixed-level classes



well as performance and happiness, we also looked at motivation.

Tell us about study #2.

The Leeds University gym manager was a fan of Myzone, so we collaborated with them in an eight-week study of 251 participants, again with a female bias that's typical of group exercise.

Using Myzone enabled us to compare the impact of social comparison – a subjective way of benchmarking your own performance – with the objectivity of visible effort data.

In this second study, self-reported fitness levels were used to categorise participants as beginner or advanced, with additional InBody assessments supporting these categorisations.

People were then randomly and anonymously allocated to one of eight groups using the variables of advanced vs beginner; same-level or mixed-level group; and with or without effort visibility – that is, a Myzone screen at the front of the class

“For beginners, being able to see effort data reduced the negative impact of time on their exercise enthusiasm”

showing participants' real-time effort as percentages on colour-coded squares.

For eight weeks, participants took part in once-weekly, 30-minute bodyweight HIIT classes – the same workout for each group, refreshed each week. We had a maximum of 15 people per class and a total of 22 weekly classes. All participants wore a Myzone belt to provide effort data, but only those in the effort visibility groups could see it. ▶



PHOTO: © MIDTOWN ATHLETIC CLUBS

- ▶ The objective of the study was to track how performance, motivation and happiness changed over time in the different groups.

What did you discover?

In the groups without effort visibility, we saw similar results to the original pilot study: beginners in mixed-level classes were more motivated and performed better – in terms of calories burned – than beginners in same-level classes.

Around week eight, the beginners in same-level classes with no effort visibility really began to struggle with motivation.

This gives me confidence that the results of this second study would be replicated in other gym-based HIIT classes such as indoor cycling.

Where beginners could see their effort on-screen, however, they were far more motivated, irrespective of whether they were in mixed- or same-level classes. That motivation was also sustained throughout the eight weeks.

Effort visibility effectively erased the impact of group composition and lessened the natural decline in motivation over time – something gyms are all too familiar with as new members lose motivation and drop off.

Interestingly, advanced participants in mixed-level classes were slightly more motivated when they *didn't* see their effort data than when they saw it.

This could be explained by the way Myzone works: by rewarding personal effort, it's easier for beginners to hit the red zone [maximum effort] than it is for seasoned exercisers, who might have felt they were smashing it until they saw themselves only in the yellow zone compared to others in the red.

However, while advanced participants in mixed-level classes were more motivated with no data shown, they didn't perform as well, performing on a par with beginners.

By contrast, when data was visible, advanced participants in mixed-level classes pushed themselves to perform

Above: Advanced participants in mixed classes work hard to hit the top effort zone – if data is visible

“In advanced-only classes, performance was better with no effort visibility – the only group in which this was the case”



PHOTO: © ORBISKE

Above: Exercise makes you happy – and seeing your effort data makes you even happier

“Over time, happiness in exercise was higher across the board when effort was visible than when it was not”



- ▶ better than the beginners – even if they felt demotivated in the process!

In this second study, we also assessed advanced individuals in same-level (advanced-only) classes. Here, performance was actually better with no effort visibility – the only group in which this was the case.

Other interesting findings include the way data visibility drove greater uniformity in performance: all groups were much closer in mean calories burned when they could see their data. Their performance still dropped over time, but this could be explained by the study effect: in week one, participants are keen to make a good impression, but by

halfway through the study their excitement wanes and they don't push as hard.

What about happiness?

Advanced participants were always happier than beginners, with or without effort visibility.

Where beginners had no visibility of their effort data, group composition strongly influenced their happiness: in mixed-level classes, their happiness initially fell, then stabilised; in same-level classes, their happiness plummeted by week eight.

Where beginners had effort visibility, their happiness still dropped a little by week eight; in the normal world, they would likely have



Above: Data visibility drives uniformity in participants' performance

been given the chance to try something different if they weren't enjoying HIIT, but that wasn't the case in this study. However, the drop was far less dramatic. Being able to see their effort reduced the negative impact of time on beginners' exercise enthusiasm.

Finally, looking at the mean scores of all participants combined, those who could see their data were significantly happier at week four (5.17 out of 7.0) and week eight (5.12 out of 7.0) than those who could not (4.85 out of 7.0 at week four, and 4.75 out of 7.0 at week eight). ●

 [linkedin.com/in/karentejedorbowen](https://www.linkedin.com/in/karentejedorbowen)

Key findings: THE SNAPSHOT VERSION

- ◆ When you can't see your effort data, motivation and performance might go up or down depending on who is around you.
- ◆ Motivation remained much more stable across eight weeks in groups with visible effort data.
- ◆ Effort visibility was especially beneficial for beginners' motivation.
- ◆ Visibility increased performance (calorie burn) in all groups except advanced in same-level classes, who performed better with no visibility.
- ◆ Effort visibility brought uniformity to performance across groups, with all groups much closer in terms of their mean calorie burn.
- ◆ For beginners, being able to see effort data reduced the negative impact of time on their exercise enthusiasm.
- ◆ Without effort visibility, beginners performed much better in mixed-level classes – without feeling significantly less happy than in a same-level class.
- ◆ Over time, happiness in exercise was higher across the board when effort was visible than when it was not.



Above: Signe Fjord says those who question the power of aromatherapy should come and try it

“It’s more profound than I can find the words to explain, but when you experience it for yourself, you understand”

Scent-sational

Signe Fjord has combined indoor cycling with aromatherapy to create a concept she calls Aroma Bike, adding new layers of experience to every class. She speaks to Kate Cracknell

“**T**o those who question the power of aromatherapy, I say come and try it,” says Signe Fjord, a law school graduate turned life coach and indoor cycling instructor, who has brought aromatherapy to her classes under the banner of Aroma Bike. “I keep it low key and I don’t shout too loud about it, because I know people might question it. In any case, it’s more profound than I can find the words to explain. But when you experience it for yourself, you understand.”

This pragmatic approach makes sense, as in spite of many studies over the years showing the diverse benefits of aromatherapy – from stress reduction to improved sleep, pain relief to better digestion and more – many institutions still deem the evidence inconclusive.

Yet we know we sleep better with lavender on our pillow; we’ve felt how aromatherapy heightens a massage experience; many of us will have used tea tree oil for its antiseptic qualities; and in Australia, where Fjord used to live, “eucalyptus



Fjord favours doTERRA – a 100% pure oil



► oil is used for everything!" She adds: "Aromatherapy is a millennia-old practice that's naturally part of our daily routines."

Powering performance

Fjord continues: "People mostly know about the use of aromatherapy in relaxation. Fewer people know about its impact on performance."

She points to a US pilot study conducted among healthy male students and published

Above: Fjord uses diffusers in the studio to create a welcoming environment

Right: A blend of wild orange + peppermint is Fjord's go-to

Far right: doTerra's Deep Blue oil blend can ease tense, aching muscles

“People mostly know about the use of aromatherapy in relaxation. Fewer people know about its impact on performance.”

in 2018, which set out to “investigate the acute effects of peppermint oil ingestion on exercise performance, in particular the ventilatory threshold”. Why? Because the ventilatory threshold – a percentage of VO_2 max and, in layman’s terms, the point at which higher-intensity exercise causes hyperventilation – “improves with endurance training and has been shown to predict maximal endurance performance”.

The cycling-based study found the ventilatory threshold occurred at a significantly higher percentage of VO_2 max following peppermint oil ingestion, without affecting VO_2 max itself. In other words, it gave riders more scope to push themselves during training.

“One of my elite cycling friends, who has qualified for the amateur World Championships, now puts a drop of peppermint oil in his water whenever





► he's cycling and rubs some on his chest to help him breathe easier," says Fjord. "Most of my new customers are now male cyclists who want to perform better."

That said, Fjord is quick not to make overly bold statements or any medical claims. "Mostly, Aroma Bike is about bringing additional layers of experience to a class, using uplifting oils that give people an additional reason and reward for attending in person."

"I like to offer as much benefit from every workout as I can, layering on the goodness while remembering that with aromatherapy, less is more: one drop of wild orange in someone's palm after a stressful day can genuinely be the best moment of their day."

Uplifting oils

Aroma Bike was initially born of need, says Fjord. "When I moved from the Copenhagen area to the north of Denmark, I began instructing at a small corporate gym where the cycle studio smelled pretty bad! Diffusing aromatherapy oils helped address that. But the gym manager quickly came onboard when I used doTerra's Deep Blue oil blend to successfully relieve the tension in his neck; doTerra is the oil brand I use."

She continues: "I'd always used oils here and there in class, but the north of Denmark is all about 'hygge', which gave me licence to develop a more complete Aroma Bike concept."

"I theme my classes and occasionally do something unpredictable, creating new ►



“Aroma Bike brings layers of experience to a class, using uplifting oils that give an additional reward for attending in person”

Left: Oil dropped on palms at the start and end of class prepares people for the workout and aids the wind-down

Below: A drop of wild orange in someone’s palm after a stressful day “can be the best moment of their day”

Ejord’s favourites

Mental clarity and enhanced focus: Lemon, rosemary or frankincense

Inner balance: Wild orange + peppermint blend

Forest bathing: Eucalyptus

Peak performance: Peppermint

Renewed energy: Basil

Stress release, restorative or chill-out: Lavender or vetiver

Body acceptance: Grapefruit

Confidence: Bergamot



► experiences with unusual oils to surprise people. But mostly I keep it simple, creating workouts using Intelligent Cycling and then layering on oils that everyone will recognise.

“For example, in yesterday’s class I had three diffusers in the room – one drop of oil per diffuser so as not to overwhelm – and used my go-to blend of wild orange with peppermint. It’s a lovely blend to create a welcoming environment and brings you back to your natural balance; it’s amazing how the body knows how to heal itself if you give it the right tools.

“I then began the class with a drop of eucalyptus oil onto each rider’s palm for the warm-up. Eucalyptus is a great all-rounder, from helping you breathe to

Aromatherapy top tips

Use a 100 per cent pure oil; Fjord favours doTerra. “The market is full of bad quality oils. An untrained nose might not notice the difference, but your body and brain will. Do your research.”

Always remember ‘less is more’. One drop of oil is many times more potent than the plant itself.

Start simple with peppermint and wild orange, plus lavender for the wind-down.

Only certain oils such as peppermint and lemon can be ingested and even then, only ever therapeutic-grade oils. Check the label.

Dilute in a carrier oil for topical application; with very few exceptions, neat aromatherapy oil should not be applied to the skin.

Use the right oils at the right time. “You wouldn’t have an espresso before bed, while a chamomile tea in the morning won’t do much to wake you up.”



“Cycling is how I stay connected with myself physically and mentally. Adding aromatherapy takes that a step further still.”

Left: Fjord's elite cycling clients use aromatherapy to boost performance

Top right: Fjord also runs aromatherapy mindfulness classes at the gym

Bottom right: Diffusing grounding oil blends can promote a sense of calm

creating a sense of what the Japanese call *shinrin yoku* – forest bathing – the refreshing, feelgood sensation of being in nature. I looked participants in the eye and we took three deep breaths together. It's a profound way to meet and greet each individual during the warm-up, focusing on positive thoughts. 'I see you. I welcome you. You are important. You matter.'

"Towards the end of class, I dropped a balancing, grounding blend onto everyone's palm to help them wind down. And then after class – it's a really social gym where everyone stays behind to chat – I had peppermint oil and Deep Blue on-hand for tired muscles."

Expanding the concept

Since she began at the gym a year ago, uptake of Aroma Bike has been so positive that Fjord also now runs aromatherapy mindfulness classes, using diffusers and topical applications to promote peace and balance. Coming soon, a new spa area will see aromatherapy oils diffused into the sauna.

But it all started with cycling. Fjord concludes: "I've done many things in my life, but it's always cycling I've come back to. From triathlons in my teens to Ironman aged 20 and an indoor cycling instructor for 14 years now, cycling has been a lifelong passion. It's how I stay connected with myself physically and mentally.

"I've also found it a great way to help people around me be happy. Adding aromatherapy takes that a step further still." ●



 @signe_fjord

RIDE HIGH

MAGAZINE.COM

POWERED BY

BODY BIKE[®]



*Get every edition of Ride High delivered direct to your inbox - **FOR FREE***