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MARCH 5, 2001

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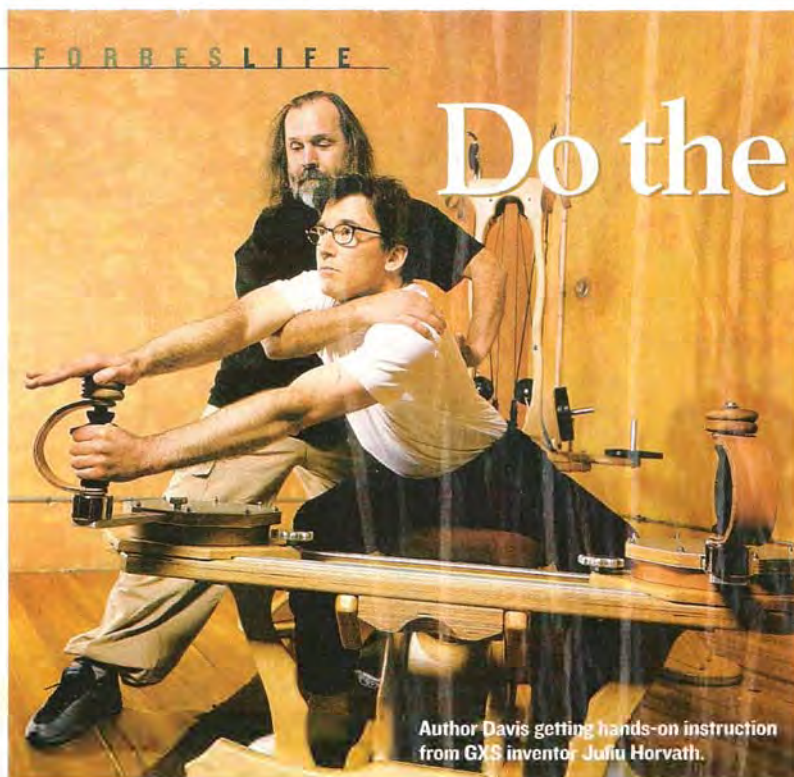
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Do the Twist

FITNESS | Looking for the next big thing in exercise? Gyrotonic promises to make you stronger, more limber. It might even shave a few strokes off your golf game.



Author Davis getting hands-on instruction from GXS inventor Juliu Horvath.

BY JONATHAN DAVIS

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT you'd finally achieved true hipness by adding Pilates (or some such trendy discipline) to your fitness routine, the wheel of physical culture has turned yet again. Early adopters are gravitating toward an even newer and certainly more avant-garde regimen called Gyrotonic.

This system of rotational exercises has already caught on with dancers, martial artists, physical rehab patients and a smattering of celebrities. But Gyro's greatest appeal may ultimately be to golfers, since the exercises lengthen muscles and loosen joints, thus adding both finesse and oomph to one's golf swing.

Conrad Lawrence, a Los Angeles golf instructor who has devoted 20 years to coaching duffers, argues that titanium putters and depleted uranium drivers do only so much to improve a player's stroke. "Everybody can buy the same equipment the pros use," he explains. "Players who want a real advantage have to train their bodies." For him personally, that means a Gyrotonic workout session three times a week. Andrew Kahn, 57, a consultant in the apparel industry, recently tried Body Balance—a popular swing improve-

ment program. After taking several Gyrotonic sessions, however, he's convinced Gyro is "far superior."

The exercises are performed on a peculiar-looking piece of equipment—a combination pulley tower/exercise bench called the Gyrotonic Expansion System, or GXS—which a British commentator has likened to a cross between a medieval torture rack and a gynecological examination table. Others have compared it to an art nouveau hall stand. A better metaphor? It's the Claudia Schiffer of exercise devices—tall, blonde, European-looking and more than a bit intimidating, at least until you get to know it.

The acquaintance begins with securing yourself by leather straps to the pulley tower or grasping the iron-and-wood handles of a pair of rotating wheels on the bench. Then you're ready to perform carefully choreographed sets of circular movements with both the arms and legs. The degree of resistance can be increased by adding weighted plates or by tightening various knobs. The movements promote flexibility, coordination and endurance—not strength alone.

That's exactly the mix of attributes conducive to better golf, says Matt J. Aversa, a Gyrotonic trainer in Manhat-

tan. He argues that bigger muscles actually can impede performance in sports requiring fluidity of form. "Why practice bench-pressing 300 pounds when what you really want to do is loosen up to hit the ball 300 yards?" he asks.

To understand what he meant, I tried a Gyro session. Even though I exercise regularly on a TotalGym—another pulley tower device—the GXS left me feeling beneficially sore in places I never knew I had muscles. I also felt I'd been stretched an inch taller.

Whether you're lying on your back and pulling the pulley tower cords, or seated on the bench and rotating the exercise wheels, it's hard to use the GXS and not think about circles. The arm exercises look simple enough, but it takes coordination to execute a clockwise circle with your right hand while going counterclockwise with your left (especially while alternately arching and curling your back). The leg exercises are performed lying on the bench, with your feet secured in the leather straps. This allows for familiar exercises such as scissor kicks and bicycling to be performed in the air, against resistance.

Where can you try this out yourself? Right now there are 218 Gyrotonic studios worldwide, with 126 in the U.S. (For the address of one near you, visit Gyrotonic's Web site at www.gyrotonic.com.) Instruction is priced about the same as for other forms of personal training (\$50 to \$65 an hour), with lower rates for sessions not requiring an instructor.

The machine is pricey—\$4,500. But inventor Juliu Horvath plans to introduce a cheaper version for in-home use shortly. An infomercial already is in the works.

Horvath, 59, is a former gymnast,

PHOTO: JAY FOR FORBES

dancer and swimmer who escaped to the U.S. from Romania in 1970. He danced with major companies in New York and Houston until an Achilles tendon injury sidelined him. To treat his injury, he developed a system of yoga he termed Gyrokinesis. He then designed a machine to provide mild resistance to

complement the moves. Voilà—the GXs.

Gyro's converts make up a diverse bunch. Morton Levin, a book distributor still active at age 77, works out vigorously on the GXs for 90 minutes twice a week. "In school I wrestled, I played lacrosse and I played ice hockey. This is better for you," he says. Debra McGee, a 22-year-old

dance student at Marymount Manhattan College, prefers Gyrotonic to Pilates, whose comparatively linear movements left her feeling only stiff. Asked the all-important question—what should one call Gyro's adherents?—she thinks a moment, cocks an eyebrow and suggests: "Gyrobabes?" Too soon to know. **F**

A Fate Worse Than Death

READING | British physician Jan Bondeson exhumes the blood-curdling history of premature burial.

BY SUSAN ADAMS

EDGAR ALLEN POE WASN'T MAKING IT UP. The author of the harrowing story "Premature Burial" may well have read the supposedly true-life tale of the Pennsylvania farmer's wife whose tomb was opened to reveal her fingers missing. She had apparently gnawed them off in agony. Or the caretaker in Sweden who heard pitiful groans coming from the grave of a pregnant girl, exhumed her body, and discovered she had given birth in her coffin, writhing in blood.

Such grotesque stories were a staple of 19th-century media, and for good reason. Nothing else can scare the bejesus out of you quite like the image of a living person sealed in a tomb. If the idea quickens your pulse, you're going to love *Buried Alive* (W.W. Norton, \$25, 2001), by British physician Jan Bondeson.

Modern medicine makes premature diagnosis of death less probable. (But not impossible; last month a Boston woman in a body bag at a funeral home started gurgling and was rushed to a hospital, where she was revived.) As Bondeson reminds us, though, it was not so long ago that a fierce debate raged about just how to recognize the end of life.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries a variety of repulsive stimuli were applied to corpses to ensure that they were indeed dead, including urine mouthwashing, tobacco-smoke enemas, nipple-pinching and red-hot pokers up the hindquarters. In 1846 French physician Eugène Bouchut proposed that the newly invented stethoscope be used to determine whether a heart had stopped beating, but he was roundly shot down.

Seized by fear, many people took matters into their own hands. In case a careless doctor should pronounce him dead while he was traveling, Hans Christian Andersen laid a card on his dresser before he went to sleep. "I am not really dead," it read. The great Danish storyteller requested that his arteries be slashed before burial. Composer Frederic Chopin insisted that his body be dissected.



The fear of premature burial took its most revolting form in Germany between 1790 and 1860, when local governments constructed a total of 50 *Leichenhäuser*, or waiting mortuaries, of decaying corpses reeking of putrefaction. The undead were expected to ring a bell upon regaining consciousness.

American ingenuity produced a better mousetrap. In the late 19th century U.S. inventors patented elaborate security coffins, equipped with windows, air-holes, speaking trumpets and electric signals triggering bells. Deluxe models even included lights, heaters and, yes, telephones.

How many corpses dialed out? Bondeson finds no solid proof that anyone did. But given the shakiness of early diagnosis, he is certain that some people were indeed buried alive, especially during cholera epidemics, when the fear of contagion prompted quick burials.

In 1937 Angelo Hays was interred in the village of St. Quentin de Chalais after a motorcycle accident. When insurance inspectors exhumed him a few days later, they discovered that Hays was still alive. A head injury had caused his system to shut down temporarily, making him appear dead. Hays recovered and went on to invent his own security coffin equipped with a chemical toilet and radio transmitter. He became a minor celebrity in France, performing for a TV audience from six feet under.

Though Bondeson reassuringly lays out the current criteria for certifying death—electroencephalograms and electrocardiographs determine exactly when the brain and heart shut down for good—the living occasionally still slip through.

Like Maureen Jones, whose family doctor sent her off in a hearse in April 1996. Lucky for Jones, a policeman saw her foot move and rushed her to intensive care. The 59-year-old diabetic had collapsed, probably because she had eaten too little, causing her blood glucose to fall dangerously. Jones recovered. Not nearly as romantic as Lady Madeline's return from the tomb in Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*. But just about as terrifying. **F**