

HEALTH & FITNESS GUIDE WESTCHESTER

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Hiking, Golfing,
Fairs & Festivals,
Shakespeare, Quick
Getaways, BBQs,
Plus More

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Going Hard-Core

Just do it, the slogan goes. And our writer does her best.

By Diane Weintraub Pohl

I'm normally a food writer, but I figured this was an auspicious assignment. My gym had been closed for two months of renovation, and I was in desperate need of exercise. For my health, yes; for my vanity, more: is that flab actually hanging from my upper arms? Is my butt actually drooping in my jeans? Well, kiss that good-bye; I'm off to take, and rate, five of the county's toughest, most extreme workout classes. Dead or alive, sleeveless tees and skinny jeans, I'll be back.

Spin Class

The Gym, 99 Business Park Dr, Armonk (914) 219-1601; gettothegym.com

Cost: member: \$120/mo annual or \$140 month-to-month; non-member: \$30 day pass, first-come first-served for classes

"You've ridden a bike before, right?" instructor and Group Fitness Director Lisa Gagliardi asks me.

Well, yes, but this is my first-ever spin class, 40 people on 40 stationary bikes in a cavernous black-ceilinged room. Gagliardi straps my feet into the pedals, water and towel are propped against the handlebars. The music pumps, a throbbing pop remix, the lights are low, the air whirrs with revving wheels. "Are you ready to work it, Tuesday morning?" she shouts into her mike, and whoops and yeahs resound. Tuesday morning class is ready, and I'm in.

We pedal a flat road for a warm-up, sitting tall, then pull forward into a heavy hill climb. "Power, strength, rhythm!" Gagliardi yells, and we lunge toward our handlebars pushing hard, feet churning in unison. This is an interval-based ride, with varying speeds and positions. There are speed drills in our saddles for energy bursts, then long flat-ride stretches that rev up to the killer standing climb. Gagliardi urges, "Faster, stronger, rhythm!" and backsides lift, torsos hunch over the

U-shaped bars, hands slide forward. I stand to pedal, breathing hard, struggling to keep cadence. "Up the gear!" Gagliardi yells, but I can't—this is tough enough. Then I notice, three bikes down in the row ahead, a gray-ponytailed guy pedaling double time! Unbelievable. But Gagliardi's shouting changes again, and we sit, race, and climb as the music pumps. These are rhythm jumps, 10 seconds sitting, 10 standing, always pedaling in unison. I'm struggling, have to slow it down, can't keep up. Gagliardi calls a long flat ride, a respite. "Check your form, keep a smooth pedal stroke, elbows down, upper body relaxed." Ahhh. I settle down, catch my breath. Three bikes down, gray ponytail's still at double time, the masoch-

sense wind. Pushing hard, bent low, thighs screaming, I close my eyes and leave gray ponytail in the dust.

Maximum Intensity MMA (Mixed Martial Arts) Conditioning

Strata Health Club

4 Gannett Dr, West Harrison

(914) 694-4656; stratahealthclub.com

Cost: member: \$39/month, non-member: \$15 per class

It's me, age 55, five guys about 30, and a Inubile girl, maybe 22. "Yeah, it's pretty tough," one of the 30-year-olds says when I ask about the class's intensity. "You never

know what Rob will throw at us, could be grappling, could be kickboxing, jujitsu, boxing...it's never the same." Well, since I know next to nothing about any of them, I figure I've nothing to fear. Wrong! Instructor Robert Cannon walks in, stands in front, and says three words: "fifty jumping jacks!" No music, no pep talk. We start jumping. We finish, I'm breathing hard, but no big deal. I need a minute break, but then there's three more words: "twenty clapping push-ups." Is he kidding? "You girls don't have to clap"...As if I could! I get down, manage about 15. A break now, right? Nope. "Thirty squats!" My legs are strong, no problem. But next are duck walks, circling the room in squatting position, feet turned out. I barely make it. I am not having fun. "Twenty second break!" Cannon yells. "Breathe! Relax!" Twenty seconds? That's it? I suck down water. It's only been 10 minutes, 50 more to

go. "Twenty push-up jumps!" We get in push-up position, then splay our legs out, then back to position, then bring our knees in and jump up. I barely manage 10. Then it's on to the treadmills, set at maximum incline, run-



ist. And then Gagliardi: "Break away from the pack! Push it! Don't you like to win? I like to win. Are you with me, Tuesday morning? Yes?...or yes!" The lights are almost off now, I'm chasing the darkness, can almost

ning at varying speeds. I'm exhausted. We hop off: "Thirty squats!" If this is conditioning, it's conditioning for the Green Berets. This is approaching insanity. I manage about 20 squats and a few more push-ups, then crawl to the weight room for barbell lifts, chin-dips, and iron kettle-ball swings. "Nice job," Cannon says when it's finally over. I'm drenched, dead. Cannon says I'll be very sore in two days. Two days? I'm hoping I can make it to my car.

Zumba

Family Court Sports, 150 Clearbrook Rd., Elmsford (914) 592-3005; familycourtsports.com

Cost: non-member: \$10/class

Full disclosure: I'm wild for all things Latino. Fuller disclosure: I'm a salsa dancer. So I have to summon all my journalistic objectivity before instructor Toni Rubio's salsa-jacked Zumba playlist hits its first conga. By the time the trumpets riff, we're off, about 30 women and one or two men, jumping, thrusting, and shimmying to Rubio's count, feeding off her energy. And what energy it is: for the entire hour, no one jumps higher, dances harder, moves sexier, or smiles more.

She's full-blooded Latina, Mexican and Puerto Rican, I learn later, and this white girl, even channeling my best inner Shakira, can't shake my booty like that. But I can pick up her choreography, her mambo and meringue routines that start slow for us to process before picking up to double time, her arms stabbing front, up, and side with each bounce and thrust. I'm working hard, sweating, breathing deep, but I'm loving this.

We gyrate through salsa, sashay through samba, hula through meringue, even do an aerobic Charleston. Rubio's right arm pointing skyward is our cue for change; her steps are seamless, her rhythm flawless, her constant smile, fluorescent. We rest for a moment between songs, take water, then it's on to butt-tightening plies, arms punching forward with each pelvic thrust.

Ten minutes to go: has an hour almost passed? "We haven't done arms for awhile," Rubio calls through her smile, and leads bicep flexes and tricep curls. We do cool-down stretches to a sultry samba as she points to muscle groups we're working: hamstrings, calves, thighs. "I ♥ Zumba" the back of her shirt reads, and now, so do I.

Muay Thai

KickFit, Belmars Martial Arts & Fitness, 5 Prospect Ave., White Plains (914) 426-0359; belmars.com

Cost: \$160 for 6-week beginner to

Rating

	MUSIC	CLASS ENERGY	INSTRUCTION	TOUGHNESS	TOTAL
SPIN (\$\$\$)	9	7	10	8	34
ZUMBA (\$)	10	8	8	7	33
BOOT CAMP (\$)	5	7	10	3	25
MUAY THAI (\$\$)	1	6	6	10	23
MMA (\$\$)	1	4	6	10	21

Scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest); \$ (lowest cost) to \$\$\$ (highest)

advanced program. Non-member \$15 per low-level class

Two minutes into the jump rope warm-up, and I know I'm in trouble. We're jumping in place, one minute slow, one fast, and by the end of the second minute I'm sucking air. Maybe martial arts coach/instructor Peter Belmar will call another slow-minute jump? No such luck. Then it's down to the mat for 10 push-ups, then 10 ab crunches, and then 10 leg/head raises on our stomachs. And it's a race yet; Belmar calling out names as each of us finishes. I'm dead last. Then we're jumping rope again, slow to fast. This series repeats five times. I can't complete any of the reps, though the other 11 participants can. And...this...is...just...the...warm...up. I fear—dread?—the next 45 minutes.

We don boxing gloves and partner up. Belmar partners with me, instructing I keep my hands up at my face, then punch straight out and hit his thrusting gloves as hard as I can. We start boxing, right glove to right, left to left. "Faster, keep your hands up, straighten your arms, faster!" I punch hard, there's something primal in this, aggressive, exhilarating. But then he calls for shin kicks, picks up two large pads and has a tattooed blond demo a kick that could waste Jackie Chan. I lean back for leverage, twist at the waist and kick high, slamming the pad with my shin, 10 kicks with the right, 10 with the left; a martial arts Rockette!

Belmar demands multiple sets, though, switching off boxing and kicking, and I have to stop: I can't raise an arm or leg any longer. Must...get...water. He calls me back: "Come on, pick up the pace, faster, faster." I'm dripping sweat. Roundhouse kicks follow, and then excruciating sets of jumps. I force myself to move, but it's in slow motion. I can't keep up. We finish with a slow walk and floor stretches, but I'm done for. Did I say exhilarating? I'm exhilarated that I'm still alive.

Boot Camp

Get Your Fitness On, 220 Ferris Ave., White Plains (914) 424-5703; getyourfitnesson.com
Cost: member: \$89/mo to \$100/mo.

Ipanic seeing the boxing ring at the rear of the Boot Camp studio—it's been just a few days since the Muay Thai KickFit torture, and extreme-fitness post-traumatic stress disorder is apparently an existing condition. Oh no, are those jump ropes hanging on the wall? I look closer; thankfully they're long rubber exercise bands.

Instructor Frank Daniels asks the 20 of us to partner up, then hands each team a band. "This is interval training," he says. "We're on the clock, five exercises, four rounds of six minutes each. It's going to be tough, but take it easy if you need to." We do some floor stretches to the throb of rap, then we're up, Daniels instructing that partners will stand inside their band and take turns, one working while the other leans back providing resistance and leverage. He and another guy demo a series of lunges and squats, and then the rap ramps up, something called "Workout Muse." The rapper calls "Go," and we launch into the first exercise, a fast high-knee sprint. Then it's on to side lunges.

Daniels corrects form, shouting encouragement: "Let's go, baby! Keep it up!" We cheer our partners on while we provide leverage. I'm barely sweating, nothing aches; this is downright civil. And then we're done, slapping our partner high-five. Daniels advises we eat soon: sugar—preferably fruit—to replace our depleted glucose, and protein to build muscle. "Muscle equals metabolism," he preaches. "More muscle, more sexy." I'm not dripping sweat, my hair's not matted and I'm not sucking air—that's sexy enough for me.

Diane Weintraub Pohl is a contributing food writer for this magazine and a personal chef. When not working at the computer or the stove, she can be found at the gym or dance studio.