

WORKOUT OF THE MONTH

GOING IN CIRCLES

Gyrotonic's rotational movements stretch, strengthen muscles

By JUDY GIANNETTINO
Of the Journal

CLASS NAME: Gyrotonic

PLACE: Momentum Studio,
10900 Menaul NE, Suite J,
296-4080

INSTRUCTOR: Aline
Alexander

FORMAT: Small group or individual sessions in which the exercises are done in spiraling and circular movements to stretch and strengthen muscles. Equipment specifically designed for the movements is said to help strengthen the core, lengthen muscles and improve spine and joint mobility. The exercises are coordinated with specific breathing patterns.

TIMES: Classes and individual sessions offered Mondays through Saturdays; call for more information or see momentumstudio.com.

COST: Private sessions \$70 to \$80 an hour with discounts for packages; group classes \$25 apiece. For people who haven't done Gyrotonic before, four private sessions are scheduled before group classes can be taken to ensure familiarity with the equipment and choreography.

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: For all fitness levels.

EQUIPMENT USED: Pulley Tower Combination Units.

OVERVIEW: Any preconceived notions I had about Gyrotonic were quickly set aside once I took one session with Alexander, who owns Momentum Studio with her husband, Bryan, and has trained extensively with the founder of the exercise system, Juliu Horvath.

"One thing that is amazing about it is that you can work from the therapeutic level to elite athletes and apply it to either case," says Aline Alexander. "One of the things I really like about it as an athletic person my whole life is that it has a really regenerative quality to it. It's great if you can work out in different dynamics."

Alexander introduced me to some basic movements while I sat on a stool. She

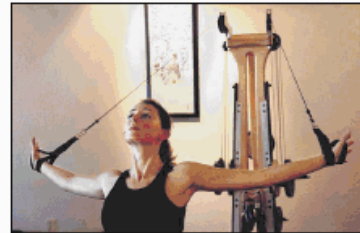


RICHARD PIPES/JOURNAL

Instructor Rich O'Connor helps Nancy North during a class session.



In Gyrotonic, being done here by Catherine Baca, muscles are stretched and strengthened with a variety of moves.



Kim Layne works out on a Pulley Tower Combination Unit during a Gyrotonic class.

also explained the "ocean" breathing that is supposed to be coordinated with the movements. The name stems from the exhalations, which are audibly done through the mouth, making the breathing sound like oceanic waves.

Coupled with the wave-like spinal movements I was being taught, I found it quite soothing once I caught on.

Then we did a series of exercises on a Pulley Tower Combination Unit, which looks a little like a piece of Pilates equipment and a little like a cable pulley machine at the gym.

In addition to the weighted

pulley system, a movable bench with handles at one end is part of the adjustable equipment.

Making a move

In one exercise I sat on the bench, held the right handle with my right hand and placed my left hand open on top of the handle.

Alexander instructed me to slowly turn the handle, which meant my body started moving forward and back with the turning motion. The movement was slow and supposed to be fluid. I then repeated it on

the left side.

One of my preconceived notions was that Gyrotonic is just about stretching. Another series Alexander showed me proved how wrong I was.

It was a hamstring exercise in which I laid on the bench and placed each of my feet in loops attached to cables. I did a slow movement akin to riding a bicycle, first with one leg, then the other and finally both together.

I could definitely feeling my muscles working.

Other exercise series targeted my abdominals,

upper body and other areas.

Gyrotonic, founded about 30 years ago, focuses on rotational motion.

To me, it seemed as though it draws from dance, Pilates, yoga and even swimming. But the Web site gyrotonic.com says the system "offers the same benefits also derived from yoga, dance, gymnastics, swimming and tai chi, but is not derived from these exercise modalities."

The exercises "offer complete freedom of movement" and "the even and constant resistance in the handle unit and pulley tower ... completely eliminates the jarring that takes place at the beginning and end of exercises performed on conventional exercise equipment, when many injuries occur," the site says.

Alexander notes that special exercises have been designed to complement golf, martial arts and therapeutic needs.

She gave me a moderate workout, but also showed me how the exercises could be made more or less intense, depending on the individual doing them and his or her goals.

"There's simply no limit to the level of difficulty you can do," she says, adding that the choreography is limitless, too.

I enjoyed the workout and at times even felt a bit like the dancer I never have been.

Immediately after the workout, I felt like I do after a vigorous yoga session: muscles worked and stretched. I felt a little taller, as I do after a Pilates session, and I felt more aware of my body and how it moves.

Gyrotonic is becoming popular among trend-setters such as Madonna, according to some news sites, but that wouldn't be motivation for me to do it again.

The way I felt during and after the workout, however, would.

For information on Gyrotonic in general, visit gyrotonic.com.