



The man behind the machines: Joseph Pilates, in his New York City studio in 1961

CAN REAL MEN DO PILATES?

Its founder was a stud, and it isn't just for MILFS anymore. by BILL GIFFORD

IHAVE SEEN A LOT of things at my gym, but one thing I have yet to witness is a man taking a Pilates class. By and large the Pilates room belongs to leggy, disdainful beauties and new moms desperate to regain their "core." As Kanye West put it, "All the mocha lattes/You gotta do Pilates."

Of the more than 9 million estimated Pilates devotees in the

U.S., only about one-eighth are men. But when Joseph Pilates set up his first studio in 1926, he trained prizefighters and Rockefellers. Then dancers at the neighboring New York City Ballet discovered it, and men have felt weird going to Pilates classes ever since. But it's slowly developing a following among male skiers and cyclists, and even some pro athletes (Tiger Woods, Jason Kidd, Curt Schilling) have used Pilates

to help them stay strong and limber. "Whatever you do," says Alyce Ungaro, owner of the tony New York studio Real Pilates, "Pilates can help you do it better."

I was intrigued. At 40 I still ski and mountain bike as hard as I did at 25, but I'm stiffer the next day. Nearly two decades of lousy desk posture hasn't done my spine any favors. My ex-girlfriend insisted Pilates had made her a full inch taller.

In his own writings Joseph Pilates singled out the office chair as a leading cause of poor health in men. Pilates's method builds strength, increases flexibility, and improves posture. Photographs of Mr. Pilates working out suggest his exercises also give you a monstrous package.

I spent several weeks training with Ungaro and instructor Daniel Lyon, author of *The Complete Book of Pilates for Men*. Ungaro and Lyon are Pilates fundamentalists who stick closely to the technique's masculine roots. "Pilates was this incredibly macho guy," Ungaro told me. "He was a boxer and a swimmer, and he loved his whiskey and his cigars."

Whiskey and cigars weren't part of my workout routine, sadly. At my first session Ungaro pushed me down onto a spring-loaded bed called, ominously, the Reformer. Ungaro hooked my hands into a set of stirrups, positioned my feet on a push-off bar, and soon I was gliding back and forth and waving my hands up and down under tension.

The workout was deceptively easy at first. But the exercises got progressively more difficult. They'd push me to my limits, though I rarely felt sore afterward. And when I rolled into the office — shoulders back, spine straight, lungs and brain brimming with oxygen — I swear I felt an inch taller.