



CROSSFIT:

ARE YOU TOUGH ENOUGH?

Billed as one of the world's toughest (and most addictive) fitness regimes, the CrossFit craze looks like it is here to stay. Lydia Fallon finds out if she can step up to the challenge.

Pictures by Richard Marsham

It's been two whole days and I still feel like I've gone 12 rounds with Mike Tyson. I'm walking like a 90-year-old woman, lifting my arms to type this a MASSIVE struggle and don't even get me started on manoeuvring the stairs. I've seen sloths move quicker.

It's official; CrossFit has left me a broken woman. But, weirdly enough, I kind of want to go back for more. Strange, eh?

Here's for why:

Gruelling? Undoubtedly. Did I not mention my stair struggle?

Fun? Yes, in a this-is-really-hard-but-sort-of-enjoyable kind of way.

Dishevelled men ripping off their T-shirts in the name of exercise? Oh, yes.

Known as one of the most punishing exercise regimes in the world, CrossFit is for those brave souls who want to be challenged mentally and physically. Full-on, intense and definitely not for the faint-hearted, it combines gymnastics, weightlifting and metabolic conditioning in hour-long classes, and promises Herculean results. (We've had several members who've lost over three stone, Duncan Bolt, CrossFit coach, tells me).

It's achieved cult-like status in the US. Channing Tatum and Cameron Diaz swear by it and has exploded in popularity over here too, with 'boxes' the space where the workout takes place (don't EVER call them gyms) popping up here, there and everywhere.

There's been controversy too. Some have criticised the CrossFit philosophy, arguing that any exercise regime which prides itself on being so hardcore participants regularly find themselves flat on the floor isn't necessarily a good thing, but the millions of devotees across the world beg to differ.

My class is with CrossFit Stags and Does, who have a 'box' based in Milton. Just a five-minute walk from my office. See, it was meant to be.

Tentatively wandering inside, I note the inspirational quotes scrawled on the wall. 'Awesome takes

practice', one of them read and feel a little surge of excitement for what may lie in store.

Although, that did diminish slightly after the 50th squat. The fact my thighs were practically on fire was rather all-consuming.

The class was packed and, rather surprisingly, not just with big-biceped men looking to give Arnie a run for his money. There's a whole mix of ages and genders, and everyone was super-welcoming; shouting out encouragement when I felt like my arms were going to quit and constantly checking I was still hanging in there.

It is beneficial for lots of different sports, Duncan says. What I like most about it is the constant challenges it poses. There is always more strength to build and more skills to master.

We start with a warm-up, which involves skipping and lots (and lots) of lunges across the length of the room. Next, we're split into pairs and told to grab a weight from the pile lurking in the corner. I eye up the 10kg, but then decided against it, opting for the five instead. We can't run before we walk, now can we?

More lunges follow, but this time while lifting a weight above our heads. It hurts. A LOT. Then we attempt a handstand against the wall. I haven't done one since I was in primary school, and swear it was much easier back then! It's a killer for the abs, but apparently just holding it for 30 seconds is equivalent to a two-minute plank, so if you're longing for a washboard stomach this summer, channel your inner 9-year-old and give it a go.

We repeat these skills many, MANY times, and I already feel exhausted. We're not yet 30 minutes in. Guzzling down water as I catch my breath, it's now time for the WOD. Workout of the Day. One of the most important components of a CrossFit class, it is when you complete a variety of different exercises against the clock, with everyone's time then getting written up on the chalkboard for all to see. As you can imagine, it gets pretty competitive as everyone desperately tries to beat each other, and their previous score.

Called Barbara. Don't be deceived by the innocuous

name. Our WOD involves 20 pull-ups, 30 press-ups, 40 sit-ups and 50 air squats, repeated five times. See old Babs is one feisty lady. . .

The music is turned up a notch and the countdown begins. Five, four, three, two, one. . . go! I rush to begin the pull-ups, an exercise I usually leave to the boys. After just about managing five, I realise why that is the case. It's gruelling to say the least, and that's even doing it the easy way with a rubber band around one foot to help ease the pressure. I feel like my biceps are going to explode and make a mental note to work on my upper-body strength.

I complete my 20 (just!) and begin the floor sections, pushing my body to the limit as I try to keep up with everyone else, and trying not to feel too bitter as I see a couple of guys put on a strange weight-vest concoction to make the workout even tougher. That's just showing off.

The 50 air squats are where I really start to feel the burn, but as I look around and see everyone else giving it their all, I'm spurred on to keep going.

We rest for three minutes and then start all over again, and then again, repeating the workout three times in total. Some of the others go for five, but as a beginner, I'm spared. Phew!

It's tough, really tough. As my various aches adhere to me but it's also kind of euphoric. It's completely different to anything I've ever done before and I can't help but smile through the pain when I finally complete the WOD.

It's an all-over body workout. I've uncovered muscles I didn't even know existed and for those who find gyms boring and monotonous, it's a great alternative. I'd feared it would be intimidating; a man's world full of biceps and brawn, but it was the opposite. From seasoned CrossFit devotees to complete beginners, anybody can give it a go and the exercises will be adapted accordingly.

I'll own up: my time wasn't the best, but at least I have something to work on next time. And I'm pretty sure there is going to be next time. Awesome takes practice after all. . .



"AWESOME
TAKES
PRACTISE"



For more information about CrossFit Stags and Does, visit the website at crossfitstagsanddoes.co.uk.