

The Fitness Workshop

Spinning



Telegraph writers have been testing ways of keeping fit. This week **Olivia Parker** tries fast-paced indoor cycling

Spinning? I had to give up after 15 minutes," says one friend, while another regales me with stories of agony about her one (and only) experience on an indoor cycling bike. At this point I considered wimping out and claiming bad knees, but after looking on the website, where Spinning is described as a "mind, body and soul workout" amid pictures of toned, glowing people, I was lured back in.

I arrived at my class as the last session was finishing and the "gentle cool-down" session was making the pegs shake on the changing room walls. Spinners were starting to emerge from the steamy studio carrying towels and huge drinking bottles; I quickly swigged more water in preparation for a serious sweating session.

Pedal Studio in Putney is London's only pay-as-you-go studio entirely devoted to indoor cycling classes and coached by experienced instructors. It offers the bonus attraction of the Suunto heart rate system, a clever device that straps on underneath your clothes and wirelessly transmits your real-time heart rate to a

and breathing freely, it felt like a real achievement.

Gone is the guesswork: this is computerised fitness, which means that you are much more in touch with the way your body is working as you exercise. You even get an automated email after class with a chart detailing your performance and your kcal consumption.

I managed to burn 179 of these in 45 minutes, but rates varied hugely across the class depending on weight, age and fitness levels. While the aerobic interval class focuses more on improving general toning and strength, Pedal Studio also runs a "Strength", cardio class, which varies speed and resistance to work the lower

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central projector in front of the class. The heart's activity levels are colour-coded: blue means the heart is working at 62 per cent of its maximum ability, while red indicates 92 per cent.

The idea behind Spinning with the Suunto system is that you control your training by working in your correct heart-rate zone. In my aerobic interval class, Adam, the instructor, led us through alternating "flat" periods, in which we lowered our heart rates to moderate green, and "hill" intervals where we turned up the intensity of pedal resistance and worked harder to raise our rates to the yellow zone without creeping up to the red.

While the prospect of a whole exercise group comparing figures made me very conscious of falling behind, watching my heart rate rise and fall as I adjusted intensity was fascinating, and comparing it with other people's rates was seriously motivational.

My beats-per-minute rate was so initially so high that Adam



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The power of pedalling: Olivia in the saddle

body and build power in the legs, and an "Endurance" class, where you ride at low intensity, building up your base fitness.

The great benefit of Spinning is that it suits all individual training requirements. Being able to adjust the speed, intensity and duration of your spin, no matter which class you take, means that you can work towards your own goals, whether they are fat-burning or more serious fitness training.

Everyone motivates each other: when you feel yourself tiring, there is nothing more encouraging than the energy of other riders to spur you on. Although I started with a gentle class and was spared the next-day muscle ache, Spinning turned out to be far more accessible than I had heard, which explains Pedal Studio's popularity.

New riders are always welcome but must sign up on the website, pedalstudio.co.uk, in advance, giving height, weight and fitness details so that the instructors can personalise the Suunto systems before they arrive