

TIME OUT  
TRIES OUT  
barre class



WHY BOYS

SHOULD BARRE



**Matt Fortune** channels his inner ballerina and discovers how elegant exercise can achieve what gym classes can't



**Q**uestion. Why aren't male ballet dancers held in the same sort of esteem as a CrossFit champion? Or a UFC fighter? Lifting someone above your head from a standing start? Pah, lame. Generating enough spring to spin more than 540 degrees? Whatever. It's just dancing, right? Wrong. Very wrong.

They may be elegant, but these guys are made of sturdy stuff, make no mistake. And at the very heart of their strengths are the exercises you're put through during a rigorous 57-minute class at Physique 57.

Two weeks here and you're one step closer to the Bolshoi. Okay, that's not strictly true, there's no plié or Arabesque, and certainly no tutus or pointe shoes. Only tucks, pulses, lunges... and pretzels. Oh, and Physique won't teach you rhythm (but it does help having some during the 1980s-aerobics-class-style warm-up). What it can do, though, is build, tone and

strengthen the muscles which provide the base of these supreme athletes' formidable bodies. Then why, on almost every occasion, am I the only male in the class?

It might not have the "grrrr" of a typical gym workout, but the targeted moves isolate parts of your muscles the fancy machines just can't. Yes, leg presses, hamstring curls and calf raises are all well and good but without a strong base, the strain put through other joints and muscles can be desperately damaging long-term. All you need is a slightly deflated ball and a resistance band. And of course, a ballet





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barre. As you can see from the pictures, I suffer from a birth defect officially known as Chicken Legs. I'm also what smaller people call "lanky". And some taller people, too, for that matter. My muscles are huge, they're just spread incredibly thinly around my body, and as a result, after a passionate commitment to amateur sports since my youth, I'm showing signs of wear and tear. I'm not even 30, yet I ice my knees for half an hour after any form of rigorous exercise.

But in a few short weeks, Physique has helped reduce the need for that by awakening muscles I never knew I had. As the instructor says, I've "fired up the glutes" and "ignited the core", and now my post-exercise aches and pains aren't quite as severe as before. Without wishing to bore you with too much biology, the logic is simple – firmer abs mean stronger hips and back, while stronger legs have a better hold of the knees and ankles.

Physique57 claim to deliver visible results in 14 days, and while I can't profess to holding up my side of the bargain on this completely – that is, completing eight classes across the two



## The shaking leaves me a quiff and a white suit away from a full-blown Elvis impression

weeks – I find it difficult to believe. That's not say there aren't results, but to me they are felt rather than seen. The class is split into three sections – warm-up and arms, legs at the barre and abs across both. All can be performed at whatever intensity you wish and almost all exercises have a beginners, intermediate and advanced element.

As well as moves like the pretzel – squeezing the ball between calf and thigh of one elevated

leg while standing on the other – there's also waterskiing – on tiptoes, hips thrust towards the wall – and hairpin – lying on the floor, legs outstretched at right angles and pressed up and down. All three, and the other variations thereof, create a burning the likes of which I've never known before. And the shaking; yikes. I'm a quiff and a white suit away from a full-blown Elvis impression as I get deeper into the umpteenth lunge of class.

Moving along at breakneck speed, and despite the obvious pain in my legs, I still find enough strength – and masculinity – to sneak in a couple of keepy-uppys with the ball before we move to the floor for some core. The lads on the football team would be proud.

Again the high reps, low impact mode persists as we crunch, stretch, kick, row and pedal our way to a washboard stomach. And I don't know any bloke who doesn't want one of those.

Dhs680 for eight classes. Daily, times vary. Al Thanya Mall, Al Thanya Street, [www.physique57.com](http://www.physique57.com) (04 321 0577).

## FOUR TO TRY *Things you didn't realise were good for you*

### BOUNCE

"Trampoline park" may just sound like a laugh, but the energy expended and muscles used during an hour-long session at Bounce can have long-term benefits, especially for your core, which is engaged with every leap. It can also build stability in your joints.

► Behind Ace Hardware, Al Quoz. [Bounce.ae](http://Bounce.ae) (04 321 1400).

### HOOPING

We all tried hula-hooping at school but did you know it can help improve flexibility and balance, as well as coordination? Thinking about it, all that movement essentially helps lubricate the joints and keeps your body from tightening up.

► The Fridge, Alserkal Avenue. [Flowground.com](http://Flowground.com) (056 697 0099).

### FLYBARRE

The equally popular sister to Flywheel, the "ballet" concept is much the same as at Physique57, with a greater focus on poise and balance exercises using light weights during an hour-long class but with very similar benefits.

► Burj Views and Gold & Diamond Park. Dubai.flywheelsports.com (04 423 2544).

### MEDITATION

There's no good being in tip-top physical condition if your mind can't hack the competition. You should always find time in your training programme to get a little zen – if anything, it can give you the edge when you're not feeling your best.

► Dubai Miracles, Icon Tower, TECOM. [Miraclesworldwide.com](http://Miraclesworldwide.com) (04 363 9307).