

*Nick and Choose* { NICK ALTSCHULLER }

## FIT FOR TRIAL

Putting CrossFit through the paces



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I FIRST HEARD OF CROSSFIT A few years ago. A friend in Denver discovered an online program that had him squirreled away in his basement for intense bouts of exercise. There were push-ups until his arms smoldered. Sit-ups until he feared his next rep would propel his lunch against the wall. There was talk of the Paleolithic diet, which has you eating like a caveman—someone with the life expectancy of 12, but the picture of health to some CrossFitters. Then there was the badge of honor known as rhabdomyolysis, a condition where you exercise so hard that your muscles disintegrate into your bloodstream and your urine turns the color of Dr. Pepper. It all sounded pretty cool.

Lately, ESPN2 has been televising the Reebok CrossFit Games on weekends, which is a genius bit of marketing. Normally that time is a refuge for sloth, when a man is free to lie on his couch with bedhead and one sock on, watching Paula Dean refry a donut. But with a quick flip in the wrong direction, suddenly you're watching a woman with a torso like a Roman chest plate ripping off sets of handstand push-ups. It's a wake-up call to step up your fitness, once you've watched all the new programming saved on the DVR.

With its increasing popularity—and Reebok's recent multimillion dollar investment—CrossFit gyms and programs have been growing in the area. After Reebok CrossFit Back Bay opened up down the street from the office, I took a free trial, as did 400 other people in the first nine days.

Before the workout, myself and about eight other curious participants learned the basics. The CrossFit program blends actions like running, lifting and plyometrics in an effort to improve all your physical attributes, from strength to stamina to speed to looking sexy. (That last part isn't in the brochure, but everyone's thinking it.) The workouts are varied, so you don't get stuck in a routine, and they can be adjusted to your fitness level. The main selling point is that CrossFit is done by both S.W.A.T. teams and housewives. And now by a grown man who sometimes still daydreams about being on a S.W.A.T. team.



Ab-solutely fabulous

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After a warm-up, we were put through a baseline workout of a 500-meter row, 40 air squats, 30 sit-ups, 20 push-ups and 10 pull-ups. Workouts are timed, which adds a competitive element, and our group winner was a professional lacrosse player who I feared was going to collapse on a nearby folding table. (In fairness, I think he forgot his inhaler.) Right behind him was a young woman experienced in CrossFit who didn't drop a bead of sweat and was ready for round two.

Intrigued, I visited CrossFit Fenway, and found immediate similarities between franchises. Bay windows give passersby a glimpse at proud athletes in action, and all CrossFits I've seen share the same spare, utilitarian aesthetic. They're like white-collar prison yards covered in IdeaPaint.

I wiggled my way into a midday workout at the busy outpost thanks to the affiliate owner, a CrossFit devotee who left his software job to open the gym almost three years ago. After the warm-up, we grunted through dead lifts—a fairly advanced exercise I haven't done in 10 years—and for the timed portion, or in CrossFit

parlance, the WOD (workout of the day), we plowed through nine sets of nine wall bounces and nine box jumps. It was quick, but I had to push myself, which isn't something I normally do at the gym. Plus, in addition to being sweaty, I was a little cut and bloody, and it's a satisfying feeling when you have to remember to disinfect your scrapes and not the handles of your elliptical machine.

Overall, I'd recommend CrossFit to anyone looking to improve their fitness, but, good gravy, is it pricey. Membership options at the two gyms I visited range from \$140 to \$400 per month, and while performing dead lifts gives me strength, so does being financially solvent. But if my bank account were brawnier, I'd choose CrossFit over an expense like a personal trainer. The program feels effective, and there's that sense of camaraderie that makes exhaustion, pain and nausea so enjoyable.

The payout was the reminder that exercise is best when it's engaging, which is why my Denver buddy eventually crawled out of his basement to join a tennis league. Your greatest workouts are never going to happen on a machine with a TV strapped to it. What the program offers is results through variation, but we all need to find what works for us as individuals. \*\*\*

Got an opinion? Send your stories and suggestions to [nick@improper.com](mailto:nick@improper.com).