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GEAR

Treadmills, ellipticals tap into natural power

By Roy M. Wallack

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Nothing would seem to be more "green" than exercise, which gives off sweat and smell but not pollution. But if you get your cardio on a machine, you're not completely eco-clean unless you use one that doesn't plug into a wall socket, which is at least partially powered by fossil-fuel-burning power plants. Aside from a few categories -- rowing machines, spinning bikes and some high-end self-generating exer-bikes -- there have been no other electricity-free treadmills and ellipticals available until just a few months ago. Here's the first look at the workout world's newest green machines.



No run-of-the-mill

Woodway SpeedBoard: The planet's first gym-quality non-motorized treadmill. It features a radical curved shape and a running belt made of 60 individual rubber slats, which move on a low-friction ball-bearing track rather than a conventional continuous fabric belt.

Likes: A unique physical and mental challenge unlike any other tread. At first, you're tentatively searching for your sweet spot, surging up the slope to increase your speed and backing off to the flats to slow down. Soon, with no buttons to push or motorized belt enforcing a pace, I found myself instantly exploding into all-out intervals to test my limits. Quite shock-absorbing, with a long 67-inch belt, but it's a foot shorter than other treads. It forces you to run with correct form, with a forefoot landing and no heel striking. Heart-rate strap included. Good electric-bill savings given that normal treads are the only aerobic machines with large drive motors.

Dislikes: Twice the price of a great conventional motorized treadmill. The console readouts, which include time, speed, calories, pulse and mileage, are too small.

Price: \$5,500. (800) 966-3929; www.woodway.com.

Ecological spirit

Spirit e-Glide: Plug-free elliptical with resistance twist dial.

Likes: Superb natural feel. With its burly steel frame, 20-inch stride length and well-positioned push-

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pull bars, it has a classic, solid, satisfying health-club feel. Includes a quietly pleasant whir from the 30-pound spinning flywheel and a bicycle-type hand brake to help you slow it down for a quick, safe dismount. Numerical feedback includes time, rpm, distance and heart rate.

Dislikes: Requires 2 AA batteries to power the console, which lacks some standard feedback expectations, including a calorie counter and a third mileage digit (i.e., it displays 2.3 miles, not 2.30). Does not come with a heart-rate chest strap, but the monitor will display readings from any Polar unit.

Price: \$2,499. (800) 258-4555; www.spiritfitness.com.

Schussing the fat away

Body Flex Body Glide 2000 ski-skate machine: Aerobic machine with a side-to-side motion.

Likes: Good workout for hips, butt, thighs and core. Simulates the motion and body position of skiing and speed skating. At fullest range of motion, I felt like I was digging in my edges on a sweeping downhill. It has an enjoyable, fluid, solid motion that lets you get into a groove and work out for a long time. Includes a manual dial with eight levels of resistance; smooth, solid-feeling magnetic resistance system; and built-in heart-rate sensors on the handrails. You can alter the workout by squatting or mounting the foot plates backward. Includes workout DVD. Hand-contact heart rate. Simple console includes time, speed, distance, calories, odometer and rpm. Great price.

Dislikes: Currently available only through Amazon.com; no store retailers.

Price: \$599. (888) 266-6789; www.bodyflexsports.com.

Arms race

Matrix Johnny G. Krankcycle: Sleek upper-body, chain-driven, hand-crank machine designed by fitness icon Johnny G, the founder of Spinning.

Likes: Great upper-body, core strength and aerobic workout. The independent crank arms let you work each arm individually or together, forward and reverse. Removable seat for wheelchair access. You can work it sitting or standing for a different effect. Instructional DVD optional (\$129). Artistic design.

Dislikes: Seems pricey for a relatively simple machine.

Price: \$1,995. (866) 693-4863; www.matrixfitness.com.

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