



Julian Littleford, owner of the J.L. Body Conditioning Studio in Del Mar, demonstrates the trap table, left, which has springs attached to bars that are either pushed or pulled, and increases flexibility for the back, hamstrings and buttocks. On the rowing machine, right, Littleford said, the entire body is exercised.

Staff Photos / Bill Wechter



## The Pilates system

### Littleford's body realignment exercises contradict 'no pain, no gain' philosophy

By Pat Stein  
Staff Writer

With its springs, pulleys, severe angles and spartan construction, the equipment in Julian Littleford's J.L. Body Conditioning Studio in Del Mar looks like something out of a medieval torture chamber.

It's an anomaly because the method of body realignment that Littleford teaches is the absolute antithesis of the "no pain, no gain" approach to exercise. And, unlike the frenetic ambience of the typical fitness club, where rock 'n' roll blares over the loudspeakers while hordes of people line up to use machines or hop shoulder to shoulder in aerobics classes, Littleford's studio is more like a peaceful sanctuary.

Classical music plays softly in the background while a maximum of two people work out on the equipment, each closely supervised by Littleford. Littleford specializes in the Pilates system, a method of body balancing and rehabilitation that was developed by German-born Joseph Pilates in the

1920s. Since its inception, the system has been embraced by such famous dancers as Martha Graham and George Balanchine.

Pilates came from an athletic background and developed his system for conditioning and rehabilitating the body while working with orthopedic specialists in New York.

Essentially unchanged since its invention, the Pilates system has been practiced not only by dancers, but by professional football players, ice skaters, golfers, tennis players, models, actors and others who push their bodies to the limit and depend on looking and feeling good for their livelihood. Tennis pro Tracy Austin, world champion ice skater Kristi Yamaguchi, the Cincinnati Bengals and San Francisco 49ers, actress Sigourney Weaver, and dance legends Suzanne Farrell and Jacques d'Amboise are among the many Pilates system devotees.

Known for producing lean, lithe physiques, the Pilates technique focuses on alignment, injury preven-

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tion, proper breathing and integration of body and mind.

The simultaneous stretching and strengthening elongates rather than bulking up muscles to produce the long, lean look favored by dancers, models and actors.

Because it works on a system of variable resistance, the Pilates system is suitable for people at all levels of fitness, including elderly stroke sufferers and young women who simply want to look good in their clothes, according to Littleford.

"We rebuild bodies to have a longer, leaner look by opening up the chest and shoulder area and flattening the hips and stomach," Littleford said.

Even pregnant women work out on the Universal Reformer and four other essential pieces of equipment up until the day they

deliver, Littleford said.

A former principal dancer with the renowned Martha Graham dance company, Littleford discovered the Pilates system was a way to strengthen and recondition his body when he was in pain.

Athletes and dancers are not the only ones whose bodies are out of balance as a result of their occupations.

"People who sit at desks all day or drive around in their cars also get out of balance," Littleford said, adding that activities such as gardening and jogging can also take a toll on the body.

The Pilates system identifies the muscle groups that need strengthening and stretching.

The system of live springs allows opposing muscle groups to be worked, and because the method addresses the whole body rather than isolated muscle groups it takes very few repetitions to achieve results.

"Ten repetitions is more than enough for the simpler exercises;

for the more complicated ones we only do two or three repetitions," Littleford explained.

In a typical workout, which lasts just over an hour, clients do from 30 to 50 different exercises.

There's a little bit of "East meets West" in the concept because correct breathing is an essential part of the workout, according to Littleford.

"Pilates combines the Eastern principle of concentration and breathing with the Western concept of working the muscle to build a better body," Littleford said.

Correct breathing helps flush out the muscles and prevent soreness after a workout, even for people who are out of shape and just embarking on a fitness regimen.

The equipment includes a trap table, which has springs attached to bars that are either pushed or pulled; the Universal Reformer, a boxlike piece with a bed that rolls up and down horizontally; and the barrel, which is used to stretch the torso and chest.

All of the exercises are non-weight-bearing and deliver no impact to the joints, Littleford explained.

Although it is not aerobic and therefore has no endorphin production factor, practitioners of the system say it reduces stress because it requires total concentration.

"You can't be thinking about the deal you have to make or the problems you're having and do these exercises — it takes complete concentration," Littleford said.

Athletes have found that practicing the Pilates system improves their performance and helps prevent injuries. Non-athletes have found the system to be particularly helpful in correcting lower back problems.

It also addresses shoulder and neck pain and the lower joint injuries that runners often experience, Littleford said.

J.L. Body Conditioning is located at 1412 Camino del Mar, Del Mar.

For more information, call 259-1682.