

Top of your 'to do' list at the gym this year should be an Allegro Reformer class.

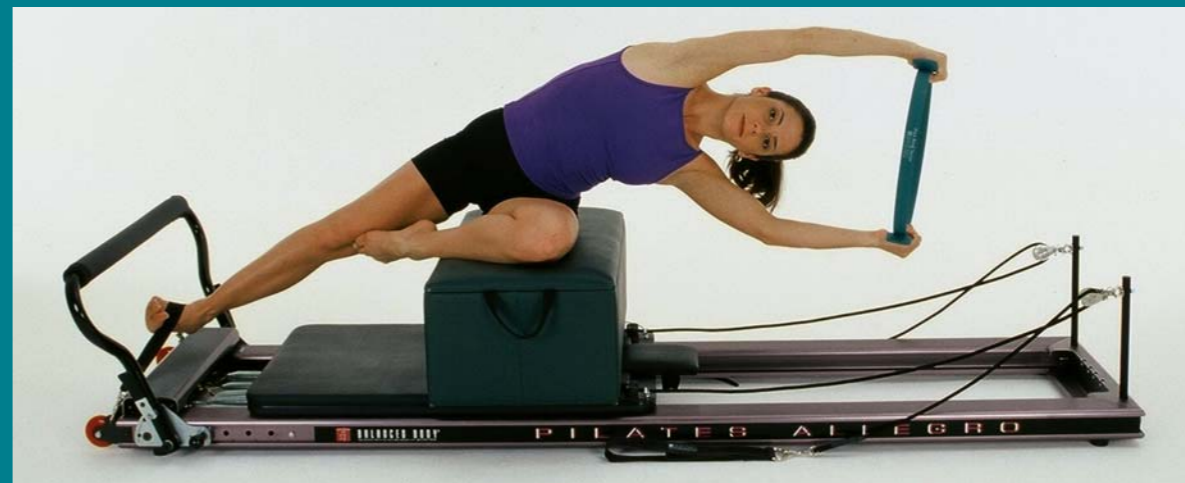
Amanda Maclean samples the latest Pilates phenomenon...

The fully equipped Pilates studio looks like a cross between a children's playground and a torture chamber! The mats, foam rollers, balance boards and fitballs all seem innocent enough, but the Trapeze Table and Reformer look positively frightening! Fortunately, Liz Bussey, Polestar Pilates' Principal Educator, is on hand to put my mind at ease and explain the history and concepts behind these remarkable pieces of apparatus.

Joseph Pilates devised the equipment back in World War 1 when, detained in an internee camp, he rigged springs to hospital beds to enable bedridden patients to exercise against resistance and with assistance. By creating this system to stretch, strengthen and balance the body, he successfully rehabilitated the patients. Both the Trapeze Table and Reformer are not that much different from their original designs even now (the spring tensions, straps to hold the feet and hands, and supports for the back, neck and shoulders are still key features) and their main function – to challenge and support the body – remains the same.



The Trapeze Table is currently too cumbersome to be used in a group class, and continues its highly successful role in the Pilates studio for fitness and rehabilitation work. The Reformer, however, has recently been adapted by Polestar and Balanced Body Inc. to work in a group fitness environment so, provided gyms respond to demand, Allegro Reformer classes should soon be accessible to members across the country, just like Yoga, Pilates mat classes, and indoor cycling. The Allegro Reformers are lightweight (only 102lbs), portable (you can pick them up and wheel them away), and stackable, so can easily be used in the fitness studio.



"In 10 sessions you will feel the difference, in 20 you will see the difference and in 30 you'll have a whole new body." *Joseph Pilates*

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Liz begins our studio one-on-one session by explaining how to sit, and then lie face up on the Allegro Reformer. Because it has a sliding carriage and springs, taking care on the mount and dismount is paramount! We begin with the leg press series, which means placing my feet on the footbar, my shoulders in front of the shoulder rest and sliding the car-

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riage up and down with my body. A simple task, you may think, but as Liz explains, Pilates is about quality not quantity of movement. Breathing, neutral spine positioning, postural alignment, trunk and shoulder girdle organization, and core control all come into play and, one by one, Liz skilfully cues me to be aware of each and every principle.

We graduate to a variety of challenging and interesting exercises and transitions, including supine arm arcs, with my hands in the arm straps, bridging, and hamstring arcs, with my feet in the foot straps. As I move smoothly and slowly, I experience a heightened awareness of my body; the moveable carriage and straps give me feedback about my strength,

**RATING:**

**Cardiovascular: 4**

The Allegro Reformer is not designed to make you sweat but, nevertheless, will give you a full body workout.

**Strength: 10**

The Allegro shows up your strengths and weaknesses in all planes of movement. Expect to develop stability, balance and strength from head to toe.

**Agility: 2**

Pilates movements – whether on the mat or on the Allegro – should be smooth and slow, “like a cat”, said Joseph Pilates.

**Co-ordination: 10**

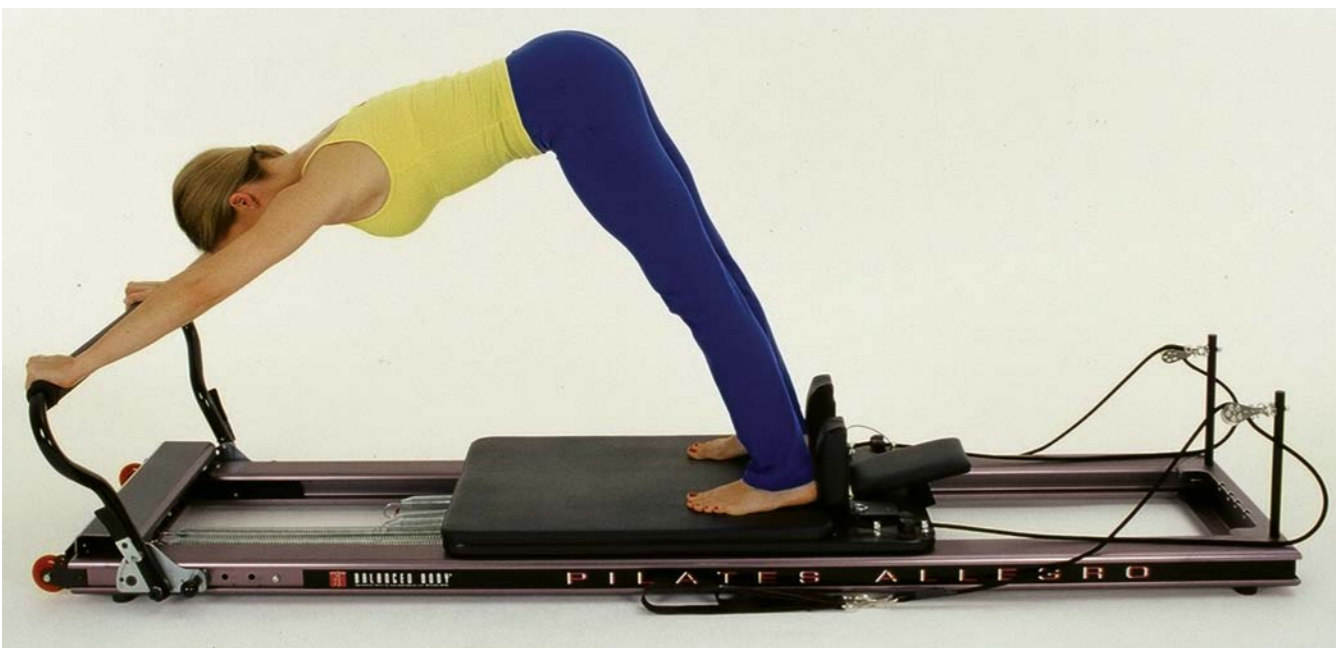
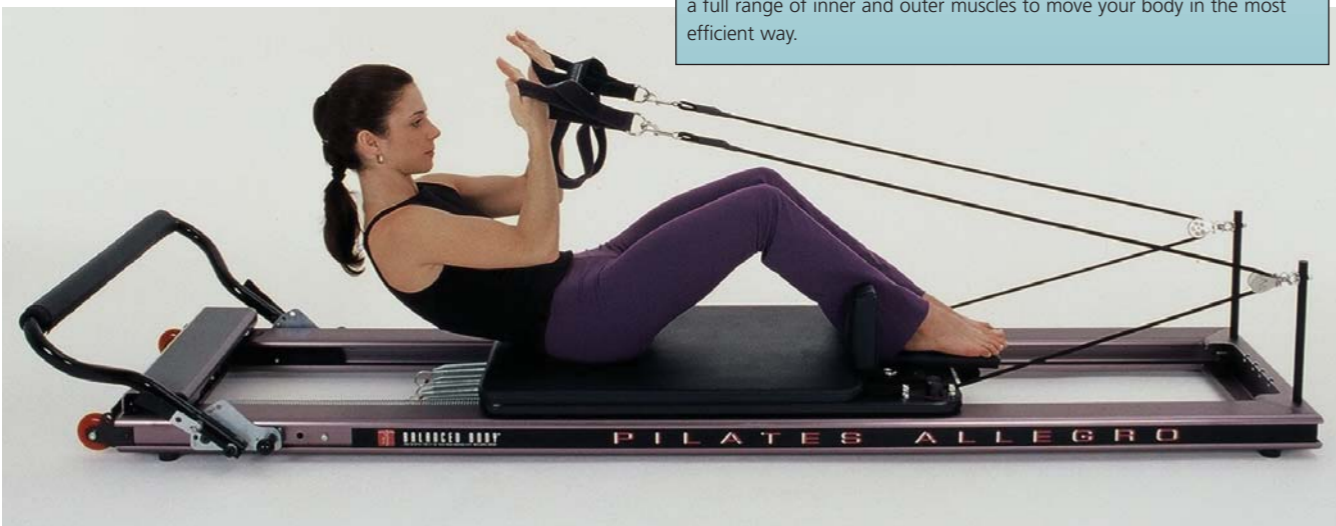
The Allegro Reformer will teach you how to coordinate and integrate movements so that your body is working efficiently and optimally, not just during the exercises but also in everyday life.

**Flexibility: 10**

Flexibility of the spine is one of the key principles in Pilates and, as a rehabilitative tool, the Allegro Reformer can help with low back pain, osteoporosis, scoliosis, and other musculoskeletal disorders, as well as improving flexibility to the whole body.

**Local Muscular Endurance: 10**

On the Allegro Reformer you are working against resistance and recruiting a full range of inner and outer muscles to move your body in the most efficient way.



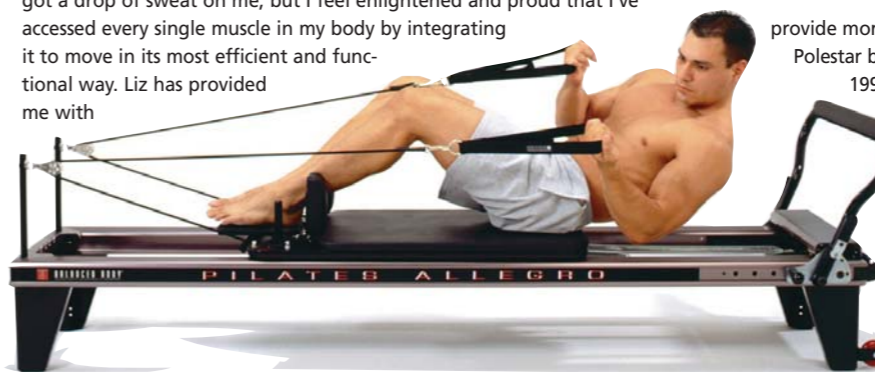
control and balance – or lack of it! In certain planes of movement, I feel unstable, disorganized in my posture, and out of balance. With this humbling exposé, Liz encourages and corrects me using verbal and tactile cues at every juncture.

“The design of the Reformer makes it easier for the instructor to identify clients’ strengths and weaknesses,” she says. “Exercising on this equipment allows the client to experience and produce more effective and efficient movement patterns, which are enhanced and reinforced using spring assistance or resistance depending on the exercise.”

The feel-good factor at the end of my workout is immense. I haven’t got a drop of sweat on me, but I feel enlightened and proud that I’ve accessed every single muscle in my body by integrating it to move in its most efficient and functional way. Liz has provided me with

will enhance core strength, alignment, stability, balance, flexibility and more. The cost of participating in a group Allegro class will be significantly less than working in a Pilates studio one to one. These classes will

**A one-on-one Pilates session is highly recommended before leaping head first into a group class**



provide more people with access to exercise on Pilates equipment.” Polestar began its Allegro Reformer teaching training in the US in 1998, and instructor courses are available in Australia, NZ, Germany, Italy, Brazil, Hong Kong, Singapore and now the UK. “Polestar considers its program to be ‘Pilates evolved’. Our program brings a scientific and holistic perspective to Pilates’ work, and draws on research findings in the areas of orthopaedics, sports medicine and movement science. Our approach to Pilates training is scientific, interactive, deductive and principles-based,” Elizabeth added.

an insight into my own body, that I wasn’t aware of before, and I leave the session feeling stronger, taller and more flexible than when I dropped in. It’s perhaps no wonder, as creator Joseph Pilates said of his exercise system: “It develops the body uniformly, corrects wrong postures, restores physical vitality, invigorates the mind and elevates the spirit.”

A one-on-one Pilates session is highly recommended before leaping head first into a group class. Although more expensive, you’ll receive constant individualized cueing in how to correct your breathing, alignment, posture, strength and organization as you progress through the movements.

Elizabeth Anderson, Director of Polestar Pilates UK, is very excited about the launch of the Allegro Reformer class. “People will come to an Allegro class because they know it’s good for their posture, it will give them muscle tone, and the choreography of it is fun. The Allegro Reformer is a ‘feel-good’ piece of equipment that, when used correctly,

To see progressive benefits, Liz – who praises Pilates for her easy pregnancy, and improved posture, circulation and energy levels – recommends three sessions a week, using the Reformer and mat work. “The Reformer can prepare the client to better take on the challenge of Pilates mat work, which is definitely the most challenging of all Pilates’ exercises, as you are dealing with the body and gravity alone. Work on the Reformer can help people develop optimal movement patterns, which they can then translate into the mat work as they advance. Joseph Pilates developed this equipment in order to help people get strong enough to do the mat work.”

**CONTACT**

To find out more about Allegro Reformer classes and Polestar’s Instructor Training programs, visit [www.polestarpilates.co.uk](http://www.polestarpilates.co.uk) or telephone 08702460280