

DIFFERENT CLASS

This month Naomi Abeykoon speeds things up with cardio Pilates



honestly, even with more resistance, the reformer takes a good deal of effort to control using your core – so you are constantly engaging and working the muscles deep within. Throw in the correct breathing technique, and there's a lot of concentrating to do!

Stella and I worked through a number of different Pilates exercises to give an all-over upper and lower body workout, all using the core as a basis. The cardio element of the routine – gliding back and forth on the reformer using my tummy muscles to control the speed so it was smooth rather than jerky – really got my heart rate up and was alternated with a more static set of moves. Three sets of 10 reps per exercise were enough for me to feel like I was having a really effective session, and combined with the constant concentration on my core muscles (and the breathing) I was beginning to feel pretty tired!

After around 50 minutes, Stella guided me through a stretch and cool-down – I was so pleased when it came to this part! What I noticed and appreciated the most by now was the time spent on this final section of the routine. We spent a good 5-10 minutes holding different stretches to minimise the aches that I knew would follow, and I was grateful for it.

As a cardio fan, I was impressed with cardio Pilates – it provides a full body workout that gets your pulse racing, while combining effective resistance moves to tone as well. I have to say, I did feel a bit queasy after all that gliding up and down, so it's not a class for complete novices. If you've not tried reformer-based Pilates before, Pilates HQ advises you have a minimum of four beginners' sessions to familiarise yourself with the equipment, master the correct breathing technique and engage and activate your core muscles. That way, you can get on with some really effective sessions that are almost certainly going to help give you a fitter, leaner physique.

give it a go

Try cardio Pilates at the Pilates HQ studio in London. Classes cost from £22 during off-peak hours and block session booking is available at reduced rates. Visit pilateshq.co.uk for details.

the blurb

Pilates HQ's new cardio Pilates advanced classes use 'jump boards' to add high energy cardio exercises to the Pilates session. This seriously energetic yet low impact workout will strengthen your abs, legs and gluts and is guaranteed to get your heart pumping! To participate in this advanced class you should be experienced with the Pilates technique and have good core awareness.

the verdict

I arrived at the Pilates HQ studio with a sense of trepidation and excitement. Cardio is more my bag, but I know I need to keep up the resistance side of things, so I've always got my eye out for new ways to incorporate toning into my workouts. So, when I was invited to try a cardio Pilates class at Pilates HQ, I thought it 'why not?'

My friendly and knowledgeable instructor, Stella, gave me a quick overview of the class; we'd be doing a series of Pilates exercises using a reformer bed with a jump board attached to base.

This jump board would enable me to perform rapid calorie-burning 'jump' sequences off it, using a combination of different spring tensions throughout the routine. If you're not familiar with reformers, the machine consists of a series of springs, straps and pulleys on a frame with a gliding platform, and is used to tone and strengthen core muscle groups via over 100 different Pilates exercises.

I've used one once before (just straightforward Pilates, no cardio) and left the class with aching muscles I never knew I had. So, I had a fair idea of how it worked and was intrigued to find out how the cardio element would be brought in. Getting your breathing technique right is vital to Pilates, and Stella showed me how to breathe correctly and engage my core muscles before we got started. It's actually trickier than you think! Then we began the moves. I lay back on the reformer bed, my hands gripping the handles positioned by my neck and feet placed against the jump board, ready to propel myself back. Stella adjusted the resistance of the springs which would determine how quickly the platform would glide – less resistance meant I would move faster, so I had to really use my core muscles to control the move, and more resistance meant I had to use them less so. But, in all

"The reformer takes effort to control using your core - you're constantly engaging your muscles"

AT A GLANCE

Length: 55 minutes
 Price: £22-25 for a single class; from £14.50 per class for a block of 30
 Our rating: ★★★★★