

Training in the park

Emma Morris tries a fun new outdoor exercise session

I was running as hard as I could, but going nowhere, thanks to the resistance of another person pulling back on the harness I was wearing. My muscles were straining, my legs and arms were pumping – it was exhausting!

I was at London's Wandsworth Common doing One Element's Training in the Park on a very balmy summer's evening. Left to my own devices, I would have limped straight home from work, telling myself it was too hot for exercise. As it was, trainer Alex Bignell (a REPS level three qualified personal trainer), was working our 14-strong group into a good sweat with an hour-long fitness session.

We'd started off with a slow jog to warm up, then we did some dynamic stretching. Soon we were split into groups, sprinting against three others – nothing beats healthy competition to make you push yourself harder!

We barely got our breath back before doing circuits in pairs, focusing on improving our explosive power (this week's theme) by bouncing the medicine ball from over our heads as hard as we could for our partner to then catch and do the same; stepping as fast as we could between the 'rungs' of a ladder-shaped piece of equipment that lay flat on the ground; sprinting and side-stepping between cones; plus the harness exercise and more. The class included people of all fitness levels and Bignell made sure everyone did the exercises with the correct form, pushing those who were fitter harder.

We took time out from the circuit to work our core muscles (straightforward sit-ups to start, then tricky side planks, v-sits and Russian twists, pictured) and finished the session with some more sprints and a quick game of British bulldogs. I couldn't believe an hour flew by so quickly – I didn't glance at my watch once.

The session reminded me of being back at school, thanks to the park setting and exercises such as jumping and sprinting that I used to do as a kid but rarely try as an adult. It's so good for the body, though, and I felt invigorated after. The next day, I was aching all over – no pain, no gain, eh!

This class feels a bit like having a personal trainer – okay, you have to share him, but you can reap similar benefits for a fraction of the cost, and make new friends while you're at it.

'You push yourself much more when you're in a group, without even realising it'

Emma Morris, *H&F* chief sub editor



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