



# A BAG FULL OF POWER

## Matt Jones' heavy-bag strength workout

The humble punching bag is a great tool for martial artists. Strikers hit with it everything from their knees to their shins and hands, while grapplers often carry it, throw it and slam it. As far as martial arts training equipment goes, the heavy bag is great; it's relatively cheap, it's tough and it's versatile. Here, our fight-fitness expert Matt Jones shows you how to add a new dimension to its possibilities, with a heavy-bag strength workout.

If you can't get to the gym, can't afford more equipment or are just in need of a change to reignite your motivation, there are a plethora of exercises you can do with your punching bag. The exercises I'll outline here are some of my favourites and will give you a well-rounded workout for your entire body. You'll find that the set and rep format of many of these exercises appear to be more appropriate for strength-endurance than strength, but

don't stress too much about that. If you perform the lifting phase of every rep in an explosive manner and work to progress in reps as often as possible, your strength should improve as well as your strength-endurance.

Before you begin though, there are some important points to adhere to. With all these exercises, keep your abs braced and your glutes tensed (like squeezing a coin between your buttocks). Also focus on keeping a 'long spine'. Wing Chun

practitioners who are familiar with the concept of tai gong can use that as a guide to this concept. If you're proficient in Pilates, then those concepts of 'long spine' and 'neutral spine' will be helpful too. Aim to keep a neutral spine position, which means maintaining the natural curve of our spine, as opposed to letting it arch excessively or round out into a hunchback-style posture.

You can perform the following workout as little as once per week, or as often as three times

per week. For most people, three times per fortnight or twice per week will be sufficient. Every fourth week, cut the volume down by just performing half the amount of reps in each set that you would usually perform. After eight weeks, switch to another workout, as this type of training can be get very taxing on the body (I would suggest switching to a low-rep, low-volume strength program).

Now, go get yourself a heavy bag, and enjoy the challenge!

## UNEVEN PUSH-UP

Lay your punching bag on the floor and place one hand on the end of the bag and the other hand on the floor. Assume a push-up position, maintaining good spinal alignment. Perform some push-ups, lowering yourself at a controlled speed, and then power out of the bottom position. Touch either your forehead or your nose to the floor

on each rep, so you don't cut the depth of the push-up.

**Sets and reps:** Five sets of 60 seconds per set, with 60 seconds rest between each set. To begin, perform a one-set test by doing as many reps as possible during 60 seconds, to find your benchmark. Use the same progression method as for the Zercher reverse-lunge.

Once you get to the point where you're achieving your new benchmarks across all five sets with just 15 seconds of rest in between, it's time to either wrap stretch cords around your body and hands for resistance, or drape weight across your shoulders in the form of a sandbag or diving belt, or add a clap to the push-ups.





## ZERCHER REVERSE - LUNGE

Stand your punching bag on its end and then hold it horizontally with using a double-underhook grip, as seen in the photos. Stand upright with good posture, then step backwards, aiming to keep the shin on your front leg vertical, and your spine straight (to do this, you'll have to tilt forward at your hips to keep balance, rather than staying bolt-upright, as is commonly done in this exercise).

Drive your lead foot into the floor to power back up to the starting position.

**Sets and reps:** Five sets of 60 seconds per set, with 60 seconds rest between each set. On your first workout, perform a one-set test by doing as many reps as possible during 60 seconds. If, for example,

you achieve 20 reps, this will serve as your benchmark. Over upcoming workouts, aim to progress toward achieving your benchmark number (i.e. 20 reps) during each 60-second set, but ensure you adhere to the strict 60-second rest break.

When you can achieve five sets of 20 reps with a 60-second rest between sets, you can re-test your benchmark and also decrease your rest breaks between each set by 15 seconds. This type of progression will work well for quite some time and once you get to the point where you are achieving your new benchmarks across all five sets with just 15 seconds of rest, then it's time to either get a heavier punching bag or try using a barbell instead of a punching bag.



## EXPLOSIVE BODYLOCK - LIFT



Stand the bag on its end, squat down a little and grab the bag in a bodylock or bearhug. I recommend you use a butterfly-grip or Gable-grip on the bag (as in the pics below). Another good option is to just grip one of your wrists with the other hand. Ultimately, the choice of grip is up to you; if you're a martial artist, then use that grip in order to help strengthen it up.

Once you've squatted down and gripped the bag, squeeze it tight to your body. Next, explode out of the squat, standing up tall and heaving the bag up with you,

rising up as high as possible on your toes (the bag should now be suspended off the floor). Then, from that top position, drop back down to the starting position and repeat. Note that there is no real eccentric component to this lift; rather than lowering the bag to the starting position in a controlled manner, you're simply dropping down as fast as possible and then exploding into the next rep.

For a variation of this exercise, try the 'eggshell bodylock-lift'. In this variation, you lower the bag slowly to the starting position and lightly tap the floor with the

bottom of the bag, as though there's an egg under the bag that you're trying not to break. This obviously adds a very controlled eccentric component to the lift and thus provides quite a different feel to the movement. This could make the movement more likely to help with gaining muscle mass.

**Sets and reps:** Again, do five 60-second sets with 60 seconds rest between each set. Set your benchmark number of reps with your first set and work from there, using the same progression method as for the

other exercises. When you get to the point where you are achieving your new benchmarks across five sets with just 15 seconds rest, make the lifts harder by either:

- getting a heavier bag;
- placing some towels or pillows between your chest and the bag, so that you're forced to crush it much harder (this will really tax your grip);
- or splashing water on your forearms to make the bag slippery and harder to hold, thus making the lifts much more strenuous.

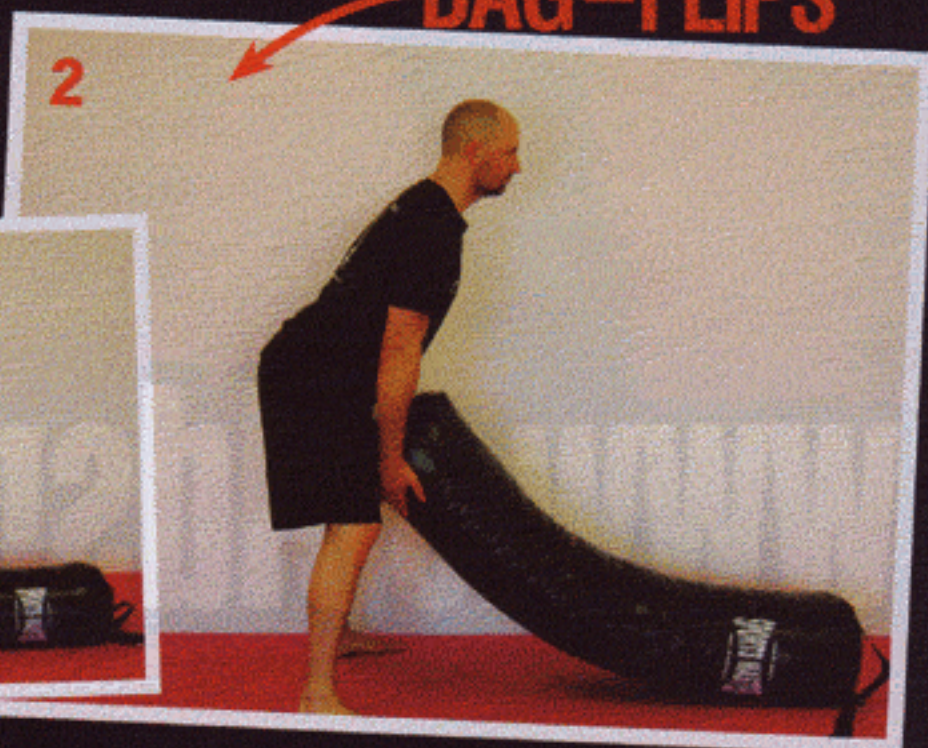


# BODYLOCK FARMER'S WALK

Stand the bag on its end, squat down a little and do a bodylock or bearhug on the bag. Again, use whatever grip you prefer, squeezing the bag tight to your body. Rise out of the squat in a controlled manner, so the bag is up off the floor, then walk up and down the gym/footpath/garage or whatever space you're

in. Once you can no longer hold the bag up off the floor, rest and then repeat.

**Sets and reps:** Three walks for maximum possible time, with 60 seconds rest between each walk. If your walks are lasting longer than 90 seconds, you can make the walks harder using the same methods as for the bodylock-lift.



Bag-flips are awesome! They are basically the same as a tyre-flip but much more convenient, as you can do them inside without messing up the place. Obviously the actual weight of the bag versus tyres could be very different, as tyres can be found in much heavier weights than punching bags. However, the punching bag's lighter weight is not a negative, as you can use the bag-flips as a great strength-endurance exercise at the end of your workout.

The key things here are to make sure you maintain good spinal alignment throughout the

flips and also keep your shoulders back (if you let your shoulders round forward, your upper back will miss out on its share of the work and you'll also run the risk of hurting your lower back). Start slowly, then once you've got the hang of it, perform the flips as explosively and as quickly as possible, one after the other.

To do the flip, keep your hips as level as possible (try not to let them squirm and tilt/lean side-to-side) and your knee in line with your hip and foot (don't let it wobble inwards and outwards). Also avoid excessively arching your

back, and keep your shoulders down and back (don't let them round forward or droop). When lifting, imagine pushing your feet through the ground, rather than thinking of lifting or pulling with your upper body. Drive through the ground and forward at an angle, don't just deadlift the bag — think of it less as a lift and more as a forward drive/tackle. Once the bag is up high enough, switch your hands immediately to a pushing position (think of pushing a car) and push the bag over.

Start off slowly, but you can increase your speed of movement

once you feel confident that your technique is very safe.

A challenging variation of this exercise is to perform two-footed jumps from side to side over the bag as you work your way to the other end of the bag. When you get to the other end, turn to face the bag and flip it again. This is a nasty endurance exercise!

**Sets and reps:** Five sets of 60 seconds per set, with 60 seconds rest between each set. Aim to achieve the same benchmark number of flips per set, then progress as for the other exercises.

## ADDITION: CHIN-UPS

I'm satisfied that this selection of exercises will take care of working your whole body, with the exception of your lats, so you'd be well served by adding some chin-ups to your program to work your lats and arm flexors.

**Sets and reps:** A great option for your chin-ups is to aim for five sets of five reps, with two minutes' rest between sets. Once you're able to do this for two

sessions in a row, cut each rest break by 15 seconds and repeat. Once you get to doing five sets of five with just 30 seconds rest between sets, add five per cent of your bodyweight to a weight-belt for increased resistance and start the process over again. When you work your way back down to five sets of five with 30 seconds of rest, add another five per cent of your bodyweight and go again.

*Matt Jones has over 12 years of experience in the fitness industry and is a qualified strength and conditioning coach and Pilates instructor, who has coached elite athletes from a variety of sports. He is also an instructor of Will-Machado BJJ and the Australian representative for Jim Wagner's Reality-Based Personal Protection system. **BLITZ***