

By Matt Jones

Getting the Edge

3 Great Gadgets for the Martial Artist's Christmas Stocking

Sometimes you might see a new piece of fitness equipment or martial arts training gadgetry that promises wonderful things, but you think, is it really any good? *Blitz* fitness expert Matt Jones tried out a few of them, and here he reviews a few of his favourites.



Equipment versus gimmick — how can you tell one thing from the other? In today's world, where fitness and martial arts are billion dollar industries, it gets increasingly difficult. Fear

not my friends, I was recently asked to review a few items for the loyal readers of *Blitz* and all three of these fitness training gadgets impressed the heck out of me. So, without further adieu, let's review...

Powerball

If you are a regular *Blitz* reader, there's a good chance you would have seen the Gyrotwister — a psychedelic-looking ball that houses another psychedelic-looking ball. The entirety of these balls and their contents actually form a gyroscope. In the simplest terms, your objective is to make the gyroscope spin as fast as possible for as long as possible. As the gyroscope spins faster, it becomes tougher to hold and in turn will give your grip, forearms and even your shoulders a muscle-burning workout (one of my clients who tested the device was trying to set a record and her arm was burning so much that she was pulling faces and stamping her foot!). I actually tested the Powerball, which is the same as a Gyrotwister but features the added benefit of a digital readout to provide a range of feedback on how hard you are working. The upgrade of the digital readout is certainly worthwhile as it was a big motivating factor for me and everyone else I had test the device.

Truth be told, I was extremely skeptical about the Powerball, as the key claim made by the company behind it is that it provides a good grip-workout for a wide range of strength and fitness levels. So, does the Powerball deliver? Yes, I certainly believe it does. I can easily clean a 45-pound Clubbell for reps and bottom-up clean a 32kg kettlebell, yet I still found the Powerball provided a very intense strength-endurance

workout for my grip. I also train a group of five women and although they really don't like doing their grip work (needless to say I make them do it anyway), these ladies have above-average grip-strength and endurance from using Clubbells, yet they all found the Powerball to be both very taxing and lots of fun. This is an important point, because it doesn't matter how good an exercise is if people don't do it and I've found that very few people will keep up with their grip work over the long term. I've also found that many women shy away from grip training because most grip exercises will tend to make their hands a little calloused. The Powerball won't cause calloused hands, so it could be an especially good way of getting more women into grip training.

Also, I found that if my wrists or hands were stiff or sore from a hard strength or BJJ session, a few minutes on each hand with the Powerball left them feeling healthier and moving better. All in all, I think the Powerball is very neat little device and would make an especially great present for the martial artist who needs a fun and hassle-free way to develop their grip.



www.sportzblitz.net

Australian Kettlebells

Ah, the mighty kettlebell — these little babies are still a source of great debate among many strength trainers and martial artists. Some say they're the best thing to happen to strength training since Milo carried a cow. Others say they're simply a glorified dumbbell. So, what's the honest-to-goodness truth?

Some ask, why bother with kettlebells — the exercises may be great for building explosive power, endurance and joint strength, but can't you just do most of the kettlebell-style exercises with a dumbbell? Well, while you can do many kettlebell exercises with a dumbbell, it's my honest opinion that kettlebells provide many terrific benefits you can't get with dumbbells.

I found that overhead presses with a kettlebell felt far safer on my lower back, because the way the kettlebell hangs allows you to easily brace your core to support your spine in a much more stable and repeatable manner than you can with a dumbbell. For this benefit alone, I recommend kettlebells over dumbbells for overhead exercises.

Kettlebells also provide a much tougher strength workout for the grip and wrist than dumbbells. Simply performing presses and squats with kettlebells will work your grip — and be prepared for some serious challenges if you really go all out on a set of snatches.

Kettlebell swings are safer on your elbows than dumbbell swings. Swings are an amazing exercise, but performing them with dumbbells can easily damage one's elbows if the technique is anything short of perfect. The kettlebell's handle allows it to have a pendulum-like action at the bottom part of a swing, which is far more forgiving and gentle on the elbows.

On top of that, kettlebells are fun! There's something particularly cool about swinging around a scary-looking ball of iron and the novelty/challenge factor could be just what you need to get you looking forward to your workouts rather than dreading them.

They are a fixed weight, isn't that limiting? I don't think so, but I admit I'm fairly used to that idea, having spent the last year training with Clubbells. I actually think it's a great feature, as the annoyance of stopping to retighten dumbbells in the middle of a set of cleans or snatches won't occur with kettlebells. If you want to make an exercise harder, then compress

Build explosive power and dynamic core-strength with kettlebells



you rest periods, reduce your lifting speed, pause at different stages of the repetition or, in the case of snatches, simply do more reps. You can even progress from easier versions of an exercise to harder versions (as explained in the Russian Kettlebell Challenge book). I strongly advise that you use lighter rather than heavier kettlebells at the beginning, as you'll find they pose some interesting challenges that you may not have accounted for — I certainly found this to be the case. The recommended starting weight is 8kg for females and 16kg for males.

Aren't kettlebells dangerous? Not really. Danger is less about what you do and more about how you do it. If you dive into kettlebell training with no instruction and a careless attitude then yes, you'll probably hurt yourself, but if you start with a lighter kettlebell and get some good instructional materials (the RKC book and RKC DVD are a must), you should be fine. If you

can, I strongly advise you have a session or two with a good trainer who knows something about kettlebells or explosive dumbbell lifts. Following a good joint-health program will also do wonders for helping your body cope with the explosive lifts. Basically, it all comes down to being sensible and leaving your ego aside.

In summary, I found kettlebells to be terrific and have made them a regular part of my training. If you want to give them a try, visit www.australiankettlebells.com.



Getting the Edge

Sports-Master Elastic Exerciser Kit

The Sports-Master Elastic Exerciser Kit consists of three stretch cords, a pair of handles, an ankle strap, a doorstop and a carry bag. The doorstop enables you to attach the cords to a door without having to tie them to the doorknob (tying stretch cords to a doorknob can be an accident waiting to happen — like Mum always said, "It's all fun and games until someone loses an eye").

With stretch cords, you can replicate most conventional strength exercises and with a bit of creativity you can even invent some unique moves of your own. Now, using cords alone may be unlikely to turn

you into a powerhouse, but the cords are a fantastic way to up the ante on some of our favourite bodyweight exercises. For example:

Add sting to your push-ups by wrapping the cords around your upper back (under your armpits) and holding the ends in your hands. As you push yourself up from the floor, the cords will tighten and make the push-up much harder than normal. The same concept works extremely well for bodyweight squats; the options are really only limited by your knowledge and imagination.

Attach your stretch cord/s around a barbell/dumbbell/kettlebell while securing the other end to an immovable object (you can even use your spare hand if you are performing a unilateral exercise such as one-arm overhead presses). By adding in the stretch cords, an exercise will no longer feel hard at the bottom and easier at the top — it will hard be all the way through and allow you to really accelerate throughout the entire range of motion. Advanced variations of this principle have been implemented with great success by Westside Barbell Club, one of the world's most dominant powerlifting gyms.

The adaptability of the cords is also

helpful when working around injuries. While my knee was injured, I used the stretch cords to perform overhead presses and upright rows. I held the bottom of the cords down by my waist and then pressed or rowed with the other hand (the handles that come with Sports-Masters kit made this quite comfortable) and by doing so I was able to get a good shoulder and trapezius workout without stressing my knee. In summary, the Sports-Master Elastic Exerciser Kit is a very handy and versatile piece of equipment.



The stretch cords add resistance to push-ups



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