

Warm Marble

The Lethal Physique of Bruce Lee—King of Kung Fu

part 2

by John Little

In the course of learning all he could about muscle development, Bruce Lee availed himself of the many bodybuilding magazines that proliferated during the mid-1960s and early '70s. He studied their con-

It was no secret that one of Lee's favorite bodybuilding magazines was *Iron Man*.

tents thoroughly, and when he found a subject that interested him—such as gaining mass, building forearm strength or creating muscular definition—he would clip the article and save it.

It was no secret that one of Lee's favorite bodybuilding magazines was *Iron Man*, which in his day was owned by Peary and Mabel Rader. The Raders featured cutting-edge training information and shied away from the commercial hype that ran rampant through competing publications. One of the training methods that was published in *Iron Man* during this era was known as PHA, or Peripheral Heart Action.

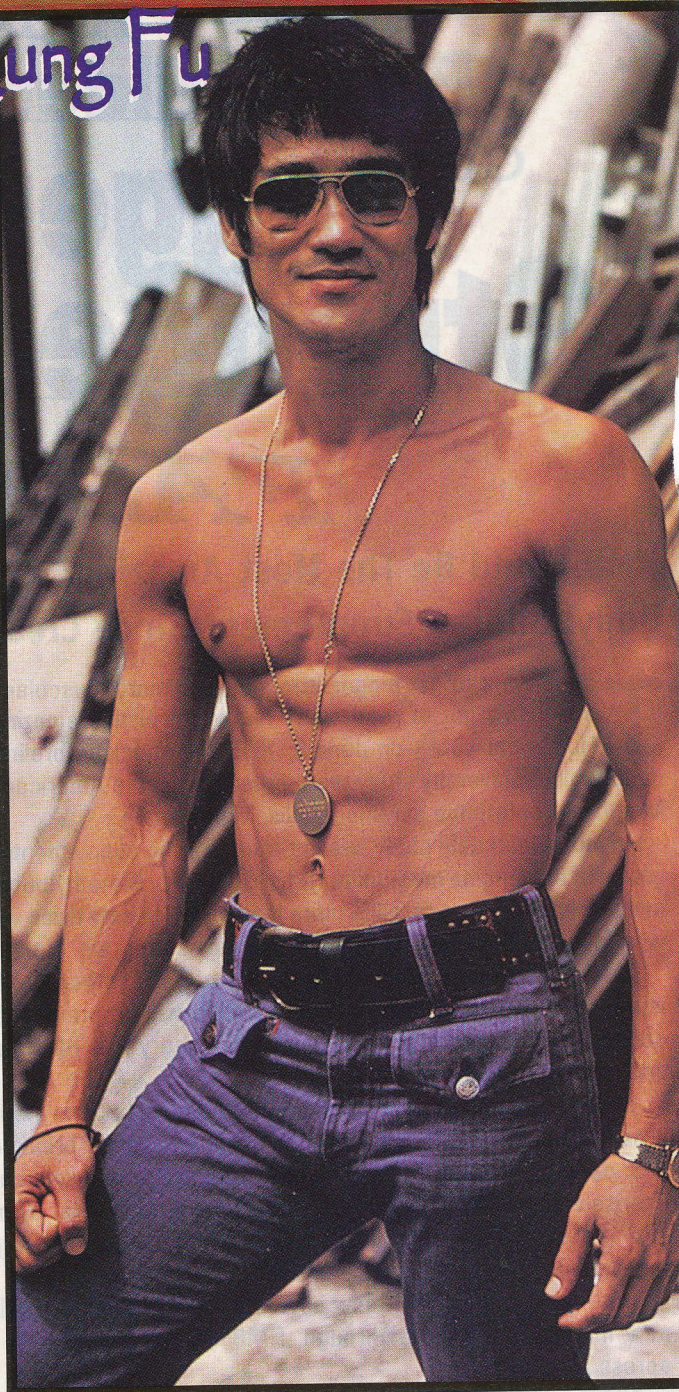
The PHA System

As intriguing as some of the popular muscle-growth-stimulating techniques such as giant sets, flush-

ing and rest/pause were, Lee was drawn to the radical PHA system, which was, in fact, the complete opposite of flushing, or pumping. The leading exponent of PHA was a young bodybuilder by the name of Bob Gajda, who explained in a series of *Iron Man* articles that PHA placed its main emphasis on continuous circulation. From Gajda's writings, which in turn were based on the empirical research of the venerable physiology pioneer Dr. Arthur Steinhaus, Lee reasoned that keeping the circulation constant would have a tremendous benefit in terms of both muscle growth and total fitness.

Gajda believed that the blood should not be congested in a mus-

cle during a workout but rather should be moving in and out of the



muscle at all times. Systems like PHA were actually forerunners of what is commonly called circuit training, in which you work through a series of usually five or six different exercises, each targeting a different bodypart. You never exercise the same muscle twice in a row but instead move on—immediately—to another muscle or bodypart. As Gajda explained in one of the articles found in Lee's files:

If you, for instance, performed two or more sets of curls in succession, you would be doing the pump, or flushing, system. On the sequence system you would do a set of curls, then perhaps go to a set of calf raises or abdominal work or back work. In other words, do not exercise the same muscle two sets in succession. Do not even use what is called the super-sets, in which you alternate between the biceps and the triceps for several sets. This will bring about a congestion of the whole arm. Go to some other bodypart. Then on to another bodypart. The object being that in the PHA system the exercises are spread over the entire body.

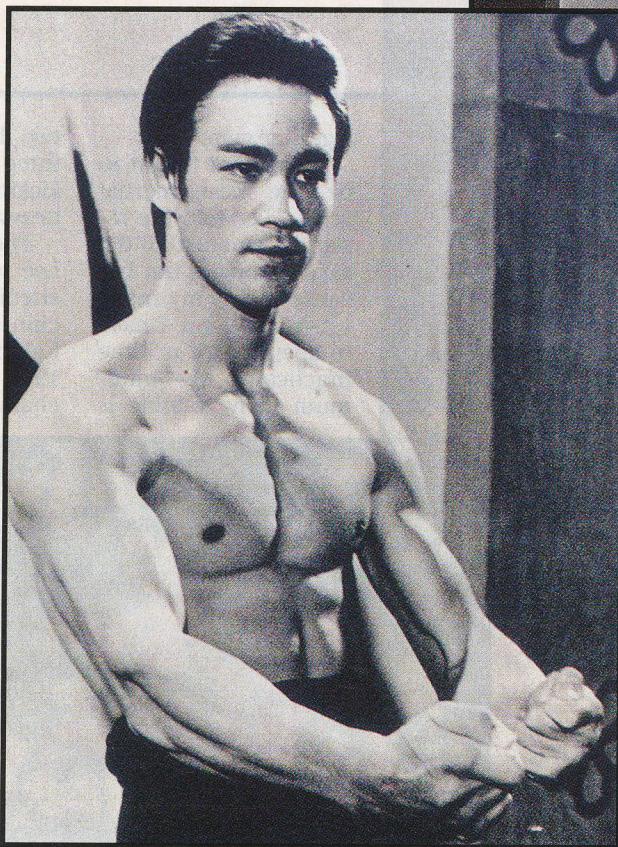
Because you exercise your entire body at each workout, the PHA system provides a stimulated and uninterrupted flow of blood to the entire body. And because you take no rest between exercises, you maintain the accelerated blood flow, so you can delay the onset of fatigue much longer. Always ahead of his time, Lee saw much merit in the concept of circuit training, not so much for the purposes for which it was being promoted—i.e., building massive muscles—but rather for building up muscular endurance, conditioning, strengthening the entire system and, of course, chiseling what in time would become perhaps the most envied body on the planet.

Enter the Muscle Machine

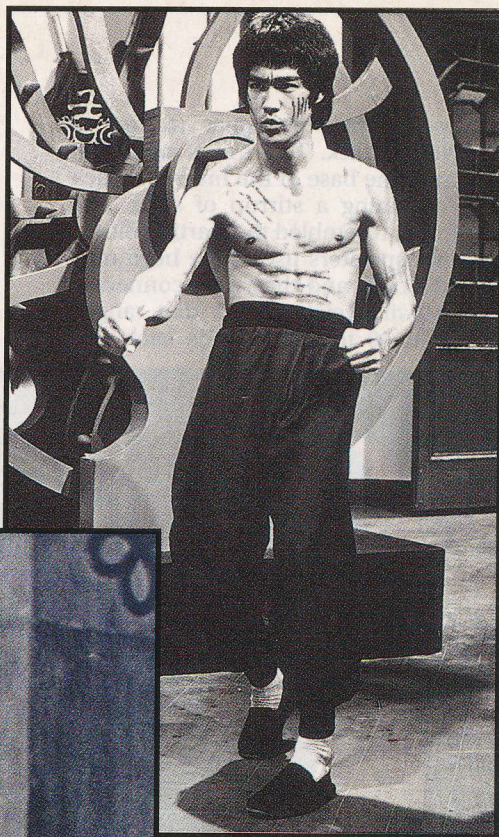
In November 1972 Lee took a brief respite from his filming schedule in hot and humid Hong Kong

and went home to the United States. Ostensibly, he was going to take care of some business, but more significantly—at least as far as his physique training was concerned—when he boarded the plane to return to the East, he had in his pocket a bill of sale for a brand-new Marcy Circuit Training exercise machine.

The Marcy machine, which was shipped by freighter and arrived in Hong Kong on Christmas Day, had many fea-



Because you exercise your entire body at each workout, the PHA system provides a stimulated and uninterrupted flow of blood to the entire body.



Lee in "Enter the Dragon" (above) and "The Chinese Connection" (left).

tures and suited Lee's very exacting standards. It had nine stations and was designed by kinesiologists and exercise physiologists for the express purpose of training each muscle group for a functional purpose.

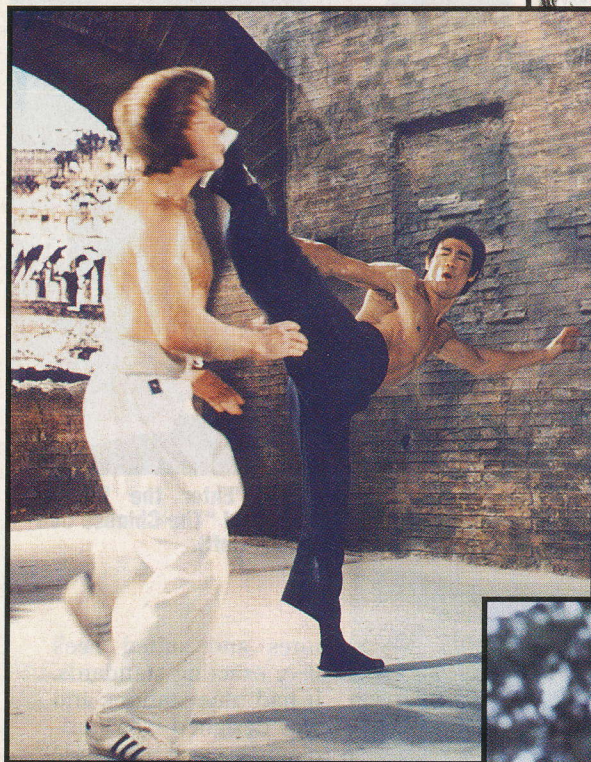
Certainly, the machine—being a progressive-resistance device—would develop Lee's muscles, but more important, to use Lee's own phraseology, it would allow him to "express the human body" to the outermost limits of its ultimate potential.

The machine boasted the following stations:

- Bench press
- Lat pulldown
- Two high pulleys
- Two floor pulleys
- Isometric rack
- Kneup, or leg raise
- Shoulder press
- Chinup bar
- Leg press/leg thrust

This last station was of particular interest to Lee, as it was in many re-

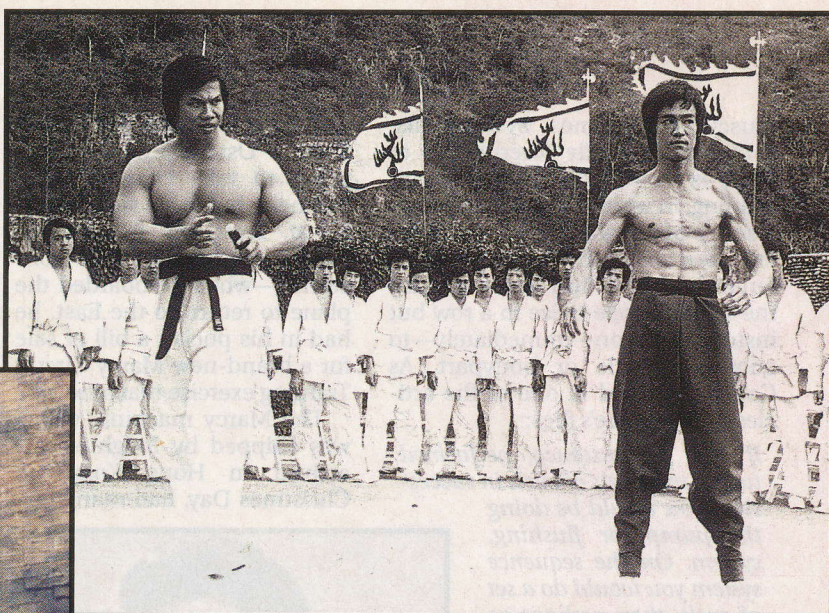
spects the forerunner to today's NordicTrack. Two tracks came out from the base of the machine, each containing a stirrup of sorts. The tracks resembled the starting blocks that sprinters use at the beginning of a race, and they were connected to twin weight stacks that ranged from 10 to 220 pounds each. Ac-



Lee gives Chuck Norris an early lesson on the fine art of being a kung fu action hero (above).

cording to the literature that came with the machine, the objective was to spend 30 seconds at each station, performing as many repetitions as possible and then, with absolutely no rest, proceed from station to station until the trainee had run through all nine stations.

The machine was assembled by Lee's longtime friend and student Herb Jackson, who happened to be visiting him in Hong Kong with another close friend and student of Lee's, Ted Wong. By the end of the second week of January 1973 the machine had been incorporated—in a big way—into Lee's daily training. During a trip to California in May 1973 Lee was interviewed for the now-defunct *Fighting Stars* magazine, and the reporter noted that “in two years Lee's style of living has changed rapidly. He owns an 11-bedroom mansion with a col-



lege-size gym.”

“I feel that I want to be the best martial artist,” Lee told the reporter. “Not just for the sake of movies but because this is my interest. To be good, I have to spend a lot of time practicing. My minimum daily training is

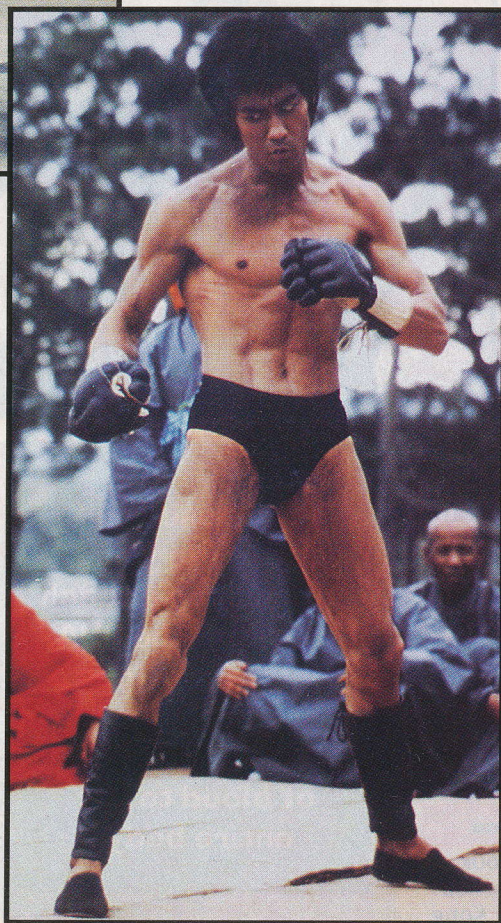
two hours; this includes running three miles, special weight training, kicking and hitting the light and heavy bags. I really dig exercise.”

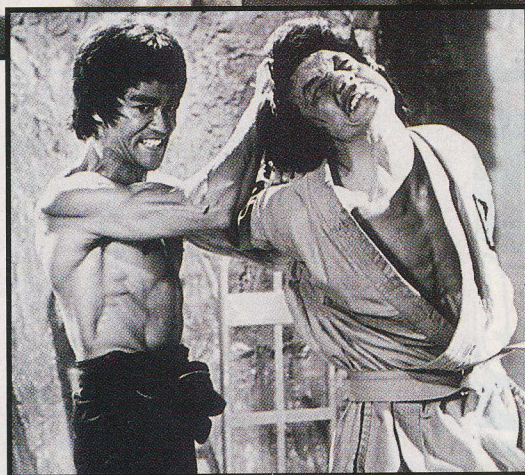
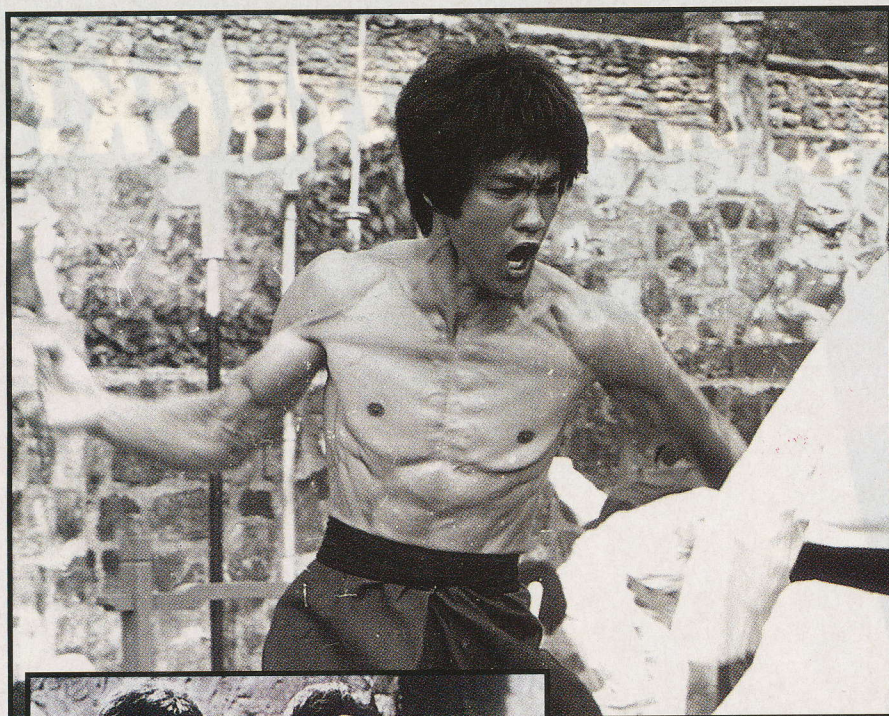
The “special weight training” that Lee referred to was, of course, his circuit training on the Marcy machine. According to Bob Wall, the California-based businessman and 1970 World Heavyweight Karate champion who also had a support-

ing role in Lee's “Enter the Dragon,” “When I saw him train during the filming of ‘Enter the Dragon,’ Bruce was really into cable work, where he'd pull this way and then the other way; curl that way. He was really into angles, and he'd never do the exact same angle twice. He did a lot of cable triceps extensions and things like that.”

Another individual who appeared in “Enter the Dragon” was Yeung Sze, or Bolo Yeung, as he has since become known in the U.S. According to Bolo, “Bruce's house had a Marcy gym in it—just off the kitchen. Bruce liked bodybuilding movements, and he worked out every day, performing standing presses, pull-downs—the works.”

Certainly, the machine paid huge dividends in terms of maximizing Lee's muscularity, and he was so impressed with the results, he continued to use the machine right up until the day he died, July 20, 1973. Given that the Marcy unit





was the only variable to enter his training life at that time—his diet, aerobic exercise and activities remained at the same frenetic levels—one can only conclude that this unique piece of equipment and the routines he performed on it were responsible for the incredible condition he displayed in “Enter the Dragon,” a film that remains unsurpassed as the classic of the genre. Upon Lee’s passing, his widow, Linda Lee, donated the exercise machine to his former public school in Kowloon, La Salle College, where it remained until 1995 (see “John Little and the Return of Bruce Lee’s Muscle Machine”).

Isometrics: The Static Connection

While Lee had a vested interest in all forms of resistance training, he was particularly intrigued by the Marcy unit’s isometric rack. Since the mid-1960s he had made isometric exercises a staple in his body-

building and strength-building routines. There are pictures of him working out on a portable isometric exerciser, a machine that was manufactured by bodybuilding companies such as Weider and Bob Hoffman’s York Barbell Company. As handy a gadget as the portable isometric exerciser might have been, however, the love of Bruce’s resistance-training



life during the late ’60s and early ’70s was the isometric rack. In it he could perform not only his beloved isometric exercises but also such innovative training techniques as partial bench presses and quarter-squats with barbells.

A typical isometric program for Lee consisted of the eight exercises included in the hand-written list on page 157.

What Lee loved most about iso-

Lee had cuts that a master surgeon would have envied. There wasn’t a square inch of his physique that held an ounce of fat.

metrics was that he could generate maximum tension within the target muscle group. He always envisioned the muscle as a spring coiling up, just waiting to be released, and isometrics served him well in cultivating this capacity. Even so, he knew that it was only part of the total fitness equation.

Aerobics: The Forgotten Factor

To say that Bruce Lee was ripped is to display a flair for the obvious. Lee had cuts that a master surgeon would have envied. There wasn’t a square inch of his physique that held an ounce of fat, and there was a reason for this: Bruce trained first and foremost for endurance, the direct by-product of which is definition.

Unlike most bodybuilders, who make the mistake of attempting to “burn” (a misnomer in itself) body-fat away with barbell exercises, Lee was a great advocate of cardiovascular workouts long before they became fashionable. His typical aerobics program consisted of running, which he once described as “the king of all exercises.”

“When I’m jogging early in the morning—boy!—it’s sure refreshing,” he told *(continued on page 155)*

(continued from page 110) a reporter in mid-1973. "Although Hong Kong is one of the most crowded places in the world, I'm surprised how peaceful it can be in the morning. Sure, there are people, but I become oblivious to them while I'm running."

According to the people he ran with, a typical session was anywhere from 15 to 45 minutes, in which time he'd attempt to clear two to six miles. "In Hong Kong he'd run at least a mile and a half at night," recalled Jackson. NBA superstar Kareem Abdul Jabbar, another of Lee's martial arts students, said, "I used to run with Bruce up and down Roscomare Road in Bel Air. It was very hilly terrain—which Bruce loved—and we'd do that at the beginning of each of our weekly workouts."

Lee alternated this road work with sessions on the stationary bicycle, which he'd often ride for 45 minutes straight, covering the equivalent of 10 to 15 miles. Jackson said that Bruce occasionally wore a rubber neoprene belt around his waist while cycling. "He'd put that around his waist and then hop on that stationary bike for a series of 10-minute sessions with the resistance turned full up. He felt it helped to concentrate the sweating and energy burnoff to his waist area."

According to Linda, Bruce's waist certainly benefited from all the attention. At its biggest he taped out at 28 inches. At its smallest, she said, "His waist measured probably under 26 inches." Lee also incorporated rope skipping into his cardiovascular routine, performing three sets of a minute each.

By early 1971 Lee had become what we in the weight-training trade call an "instinctive trainer," meaning that he'd train according to what he felt his body needed on a given day. "Bruce was constantly experimenting," recalled Danny Inosanto, another close friend and student of Lee's martial art *jeet kune do*, which translates into English as "the way of the intercepting fist."

"He was consistently reading through the muscle magazines and looking for new products and items that would help him build his body and make it stronger. If he found such an item, he'd read all about it, order

it and then try it out to see if the claims made for it were true or not. If he found that it wasn't all it was cracked up to be, he'd discard it and try something else. He was forever experimenting."

Experimentation was the core of Lee's overall philosophy. He once said, "Absorb what is useful, reject what is useless and add what is specifically your own." This perfectly summarized his approach not only to martial arts but to weight training as well.

The Tao of Flexibility

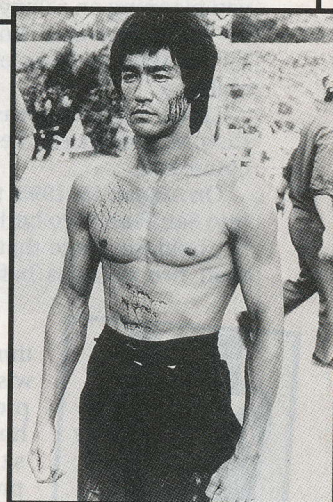
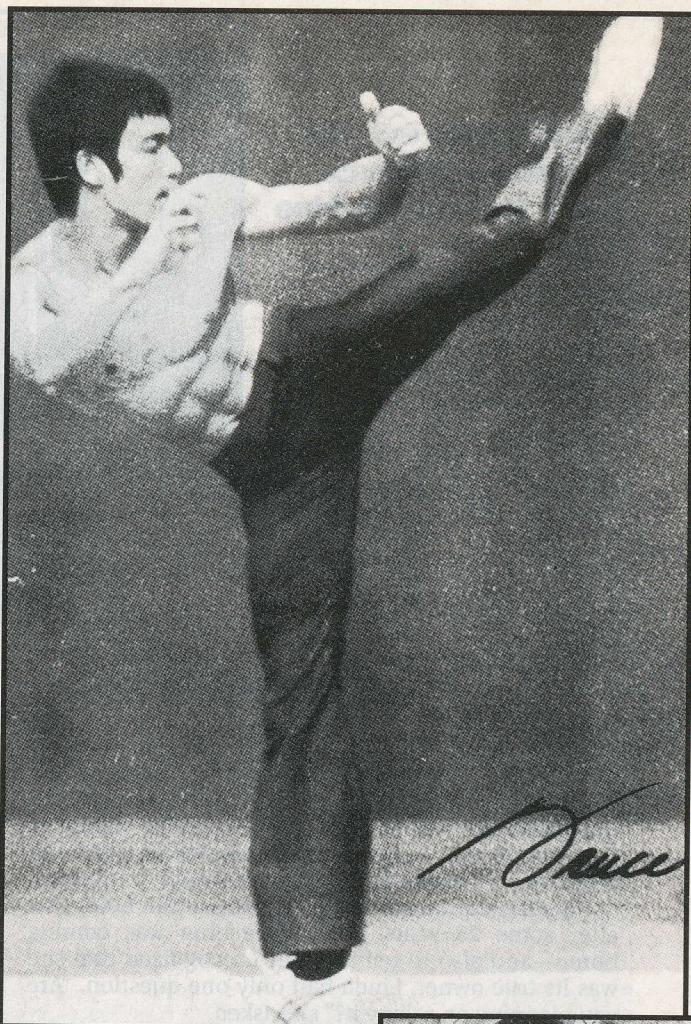
The final element of Lee's total-fitness program was flexibility. After all, what good is it to build enough power to kick a 300-pound heavy bag and send it flying if you haven't the flexibility to unharness it?

Lee believed that warming up and stretching were vital to his craft, and he worked long and hard at becoming as flexible as possible. Ironically, stretching, kicking, punching, running and even training with weights weren't easy things for Lee to do because he'd damaged the fourth sacral nerve in his back while performing good mornings—an exercise in which you bend over at the

waist and return to the upright position with resistance across your shoulders—with 135 pounds. As a result he was ordered to stay in

bed for six months, which, according to Linda Lee, just about drove him crazy. He was also told he'd never be able to kick again.

Fortunately, history records the fact that Bruce Lee persevered and proved the experts wrong on that count, but he never again underestimated the supreme value of stretching prior to a workout, and for the rest of his life he felt a tinge of pain in his lower back whenever he



John Little and the Return of Bruce Lee's Muscle Machine

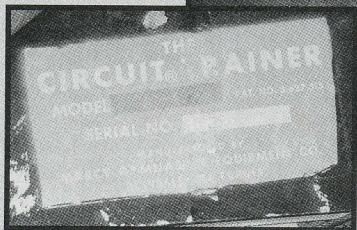
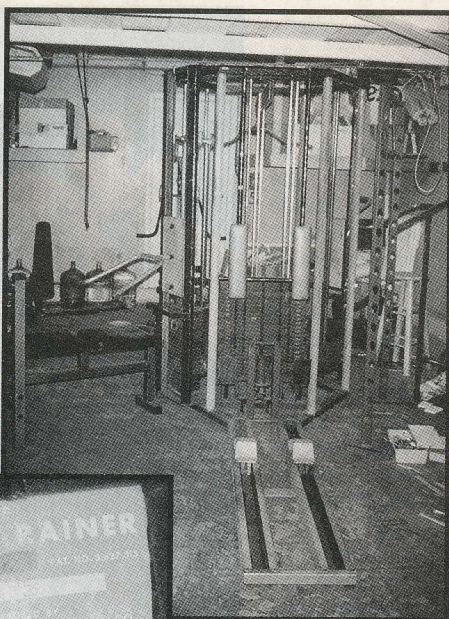
An interesting side note to the story of Lee and the Marcy Circuit Trainer is that during the course of researching a book on his training methods, I contacted his former public school in Hong Kong, La Salle College, to which Lee's widow, Linda, had donated the machine after his death. I learned that Lee's muscle machine had been disassembled and had been lying in storage—"rusting out," as one of the school's headmasters candidly told me—for a period of several years because of some renovations at the school. To make a long story short, the school officials indicated that they'd be willing to part with it, thus freeing their storage facility for other purposes, if I would have it shipped back to America.

I quickly contacted Linda to give her the news that after some 23 years Bruce's machine was coming home—and also to tell her that I recognized that she was its true owner. Linda had only one question. "Are you planning on selling it?" she asked.

"No," I answered sincerely. "I would like to clean it up and train on it myself and someday pass it on to my children."

Linda seemed pleased with the response. "Well, then, why don't you keep it?" she said. It was a dream come true.

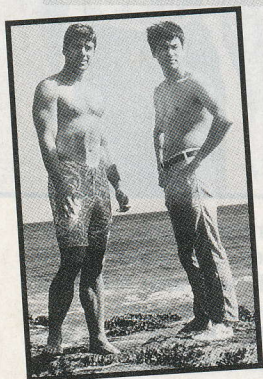
On August 15, 1995, the oceanliner Seabreeze pulled into San Francisco harbor from Hong Kong carrying in her hold the cargo that had traversed the Pacific more than two decades before. Within 29 days the cargo



had appeared in the video "Bruce Lee: The Legend" and in a Japanese television special that was produced to commemorate the release of Lee's last (albeit incomplete) film, "The Game of Death," in 1978. There were the pulley handles that Bob Wall had described Bruce as using so feverishly while carving up and muscularizing his physique for "Enter the Dragon," the detachable kneecup station that was visible in the video and the lat pulldown that Bruce had used to develop his tremendous lats and incredible V-taper.

Most important of all, however, the lat pulldown unit had on it a factory sticker that proclaimed it to be a Marcy Circuit Trainer, Model CT-9-M and the serial number 2175, which confirmed that it was the very machine Lee had owned. Bruce's muscle machine had come home at last.

My sincerest hope is that someday, after Ted, Herb and I have removed all the rust and paint, I'll be able to reply to an overzealous gym teacher's query as to why my children are in such great shape by saying, "It's because they work out daily on Bruce Lee's circuit trainer."



thought otherwise. Lee's personal handwritten stretching program appears on page 157.

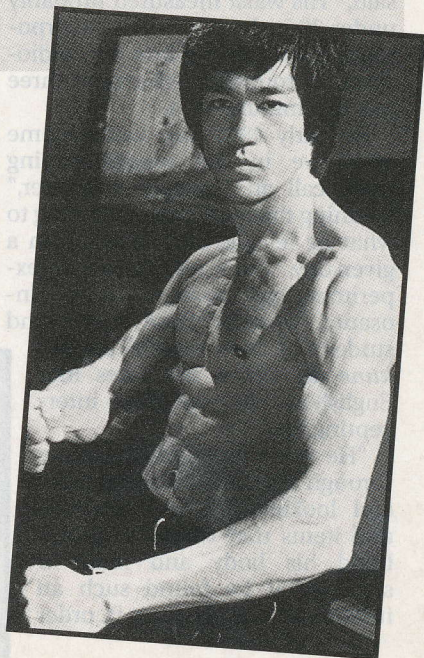
While all of the above would seem to represent the per-

fect—and, therefore, complete—total-fitness regimen, the fact is that these workouts represent only the proverbial tip of the iceberg.

Remember that Bruce Lee was constantly experimenting, trying to

extend the outer limits of his genetic potential. He refused to accept anything, from an exercise to a training apparatus, that he felt had outlived its effectiveness. In fact, his philosophy of *jeet kune do* is found in the phrase, "Using no way as way; having no limitation as limitation."

To that end Lee employed many different routines and exercises that effectively served his training and bodybuilding purposes while he used them. As a result, when it comes to the subject of muscle definition, rock-hard conditioning and well-balanced total fitness that serves a real-world purpose, Lee's training programs rank among the most result-producing ever devised.



Iron Man Articles Clipped and Saved by Bruce Lee

From the mid-1960s until his death in 1973, Bruce Lee was an avid reader of muscle magazines, collecting articles on training systems, nutrition and various aspects of muscle development. One of the magazines he subscribed to—and the only one to which he continued to renew his subscription—was *Iron Man*. Here's a list of the *Iron Man* articles he found particularly significant and organized in a four-volume series of folders.

Volume 1

Peripheral Heart Action

"The PHA, or Sequence, Revolution" by Peary Rader

"The New Revolutionary PHA, or Sequence, System of Training, as Developed by Bob Gajda" by Peary Rader

"Bob Gajda: Mr. USA and His Amazing Sequence System of Training" by Norman Zale

"Advance PHA, or Sequence, Training" by Bob Gajda, as told to the Editor

"Solving Some PHA Problems" by Peary Rader

"PHA Routines for Maximum Gains...Using a Minimum of Equipment" by Jim Craig, as told to the Editor

"Bodybuilding Fitness & PHA" by Carl Richford

Various Bodybuilding Subjects

"The Juxtaposition Principle in Training" by Richard Simmons

"Latest Muscle-Building Technique—as Used by the Champions" by Bruce Page

"Let's Take a Long Look at Arms" by Bruce Page

"Programs for Bust Contouring" by Achilles Kallos

"Strongman Stunts Made Easy—Bend Bottle Caps"

Lower-Back Exercise

"Specialize on that Lower Back" by Bruce Page

"Improve Your Deadlift" by Wayne Gallash, as told to Peary Rader

"Increase your Deadlift 100 Lbs." by Maurice Johnson

Squats

"The Squat—Greatest Single Exercise" (three parts) by Peary Rader

"The Squat—Still King of Exercises" by Peary Rader

"Troubles You May Have Squatting" by Peary Rader

"Facts and Fallacies About the Squat" by Bruce Randall

"Body Power—How to Develop It" by Doug Hepburn

"The Squat & 20 Reps for Fast Gains—Gain a Pound a Day" by Peary Rader

"Let's Give Weightless Squats a Chance" by Paul R. Niemi

Isometrics

"New Theory on the Value of Isometrics for Barbell Men"

Volume 2

Arm Training

"Arm Building With Fannie du Toit" by Achilles Kallos

Calf Training

"Blast! Those Calves to Greater Size" by Jim McLellan

Volume 3

General Training

"Specialize for the Spread Lats" by Achilles Kallos

"4 Photos of Bill Pearl"

"Health Through Exercise" by the Editors

Volume 4

Abdominal Training

"The Best Course for a Muscular Midsection" by Achilles Kallos

"How I Developed My Abdominals" by James Schwertley, as told to Vern Bickel

"Abdominal Specialization With Tommy Williams" by Achilles Kallos

"Do It Right—for a Trim Waist" by Bill Pearl and Leo Stern

"Abdominal Specialization" by Harry Johnson

"Training for Abdominal Health" by Hal Stephens

"WMCSA Makes Situps Pleasure" by Roger Altemus

Calf Training

"An Antidote for Stubborn Calves" by Bruce Page

