

You won't hear a drill sergeant shouting 'Drop and give me 50' at these early-morning outdoor exercise classes. Rather, they are full of enthusiastic troops wanting more results-producing PT.



Beyond the Gym Fitness

Enlisting in BOOT CAMP

By Heidi Creed

You probably don't know many people who love the monotony and isolation of the treadmill, elliptical or stair climber. In fact, one of the quickest ways to drop out of a workout routine is to force yourself to do something you thoroughly don't enjoy.



Sonki Fitness

Don't fret, if you are slaving away through an uninspiring and inefficient routine to get in shape, there are many enjoyable options out there. With the near-perfect weather year-round and the variety of terrain that SoCal has to offer, why not give an outdoor exercise class a try? We're talking drill sergeant-inspired, gritty, early-to-rise boot camp.

While what seems like shipping off to basic training may sound a little extreme, many boot camp instructors try to downplay the hardcore connotation and instead emphasize the fun and overall fitness that can be found for all levels while participating in their programs.

"We try to inspire and motivate people through positive reinforcement. And for every exercise, we encourage everyone to push just a little harder than what they think they can, and ensure that they do - in a nice way," says Sonki Hong of Santa Monica-based Sonki Fitness Boot Camp.

In terms of testing limits he adds, "We use the West Point and Army discipline, which is my background, but without



Valley Boot Camp

any intimidation or punishment. That way, people eventually learn to motivate themselves internally as opposed to externally, which is vital to making this a lifelong habit."

The value of creating a lifelong habit can't be emphasized enough when talking about health and fitness benefits. When speaking with "campers" from various boot camps, one point was consistently repeated: Boot camp has created a lasting improvement in each person's overall quality of life in a way that "traditional" workouts never did.

"I became strong enough to take up [many] outdoor activities I always wanted to try before, including hiking and camping. My stress level has completely decreased, and I have such a better balance to my life and mood," boasts Jessica Racioppo, 28, of West L.A.

Chris Nowers, 44, of Santa Monica, has always been active and involved in sports but says of his boot camp experience, "I can honestly say I feel like a transformed person, both mentally and physically. My energy level has increased out of all recognition, and

I feel much happier with myself and my desire to keep going down the road of improvement, something I have never experienced before."

Nowers is roaring down that road, dropping 17 percent body fat, 24 pounds and two minutes from his one-mile time, down to a speedy 5:40.

You certainly don't have to be a track star or experienced weightlifter to excel either. Tim

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Talman owner of Valley Boot Camp says, "One of our mottos is 'your camp, your level, your pace' so we can cater to all levels."

A testament to this is his variety of clients ranging in age from 18 to 71 years old, and the been-away-from-exercise-too-long group to college bound athletes and marathon runners. Surprisingly, this is a fairly common mixed demographic trend among boot camps.

Racioppo, a Sonki Fitness Camp participant says, "Each exercise is based on time rather than a number of repetitions, so every person is enabled to push themselves at their own pace. Most of the exercises are based on using your body's own resistance for strength building, which also makes the exercises applicable to people at all levels."

That is not to say, however, there aren't options on the other end of the spectrum that cater to a more hardcore audience, offering an edgier approach that's more true to military-style boot camps, complete with cadence counts and a "tough love" instruction approach.

Programs vary by group, and average five to eight weeks with sessions held one to five days a week. It is common for "before" measurements to be taken so

at the end of the program individual progress is quantifiable, and participants have a clear timeline to work towards goals.

A common theme is the emphasis on whole body fitness – flexibility and range of motion, muscular endurance and strength, cardiovascular endurance, agility and body composition.

"When we participate in recreational sports we require our bodies to move through all planes of motion, usually in changing or unstable environments. Outdoor training teaches your body to generate force in this real-world setting by training multiple muscle groups using natural motion patterns on surfaces like trails, grass or sand," says Debbie Aleman, owner of Beyond the Gym Fitness in Thousand Oaks.

"With a weight machine your body is usually supported and your line of motion is dictated by the machine; this disengages your stabilizing muscles which are so critical to strengthen for our everyday activities in sport and in daily life," adds Aleman.

To achieve this level of functional fitness, a variety of disciplines are often incorporated in a single boot camp session, includ-

ing plyometrics, martial arts, Pilates, endurance training and weight training. You might be surprised at some of the creative uses for the terrain they have you working on, most you're sure to never see the same way again.

"I'll take us out on a trail with resistance bands and do our strength workout using trees, trailhead signs, picnic tables ... and then other workouts are in various parks, using portable equipment like dumbbells, medicine balls, bands and stability balls," says Aleman.

Valley Boot Camp's sessions are geared toward building up to a steep hill climb, and Sonki makes good use of the beach and those infamous love-to-hate Santa Monica stairs. With the different terrains and variety of equipment ranging from weights to hula hoops, it might as well be recess, right?

Speaking of fun in the sun, many participants appreciate the social setting this format provides. There is just something innately unifying about doing this work together, often at the wee hours of the morning that creates a very inclusive atmosphere.

One of Nowers' highlights is "the fellow 'boot camp warriors.' My commitment to turning up and getting through the classes has very much been driven by the great camaraderie of all the enjoyable people in the group."

Simi Valley-based 805 Boot Camp even offers sessions where your pooch can participate too. What better icebreaker is man's best friend?

Another advantage is supporting some small owner-operated enterprises in your area. Boot camps are often private businesses, run by people who are truly passionate about what they do. While many owners are military veterans, all believe in the product they provide and go to great lengths to keep it fresh and exciting for participants. This leads to a great value for your hard earned dollar.

A simple Google search for "boot camp" in your area will likely bring up several results. Just like any gym or exercise class, the instructor's style and experience varies, as does their training focus. There is also a considerable range in price. From a general survey, they start as low as \$10 per session to upwards of \$50. Most also offer package pricing, so you always have the option to spend more to save more. With so many options and the ability to commit to just a couple of months at a time, you can shop around for the program that best suits you.

Go ahead, enlist in a boot camp. Going beyond the gym will do wonders for your wellbeing, and your waistline. <<

Valley Boot Camp – myvalleybootcamp.com

Beyond the Gym – beyondthegym.com

DHP Fitness Makeover - diazhumanperformance.com

805 Boot Camp – 805bootcamp.com

Sonki Fitness Boot Camp – sonkifitness.com



Beyond the Gym Fitness



Valley Boot Camp



Valley Boot Camp