

ARTHUR JONES

Physical Fitness Turns Back the Clock for Nautilus' Inventor

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he teal-blue machines look like carefully upholstered instruments of medieval torture—impressive, faintly mysterious and (judging from star-studded endorsements by professional athletes, coaches, film idols, orthopedists and the thoroughly in-the-black annual report of the company that makes them), highly effective for honing muscle.

The machines are weighed, counterweighed and organized around the principle of the cam, which resembles nothing so much as the cross-section of the Chambered Nautilus, for which both the machines and the company that builds them are named.

The kidney-shaped cam, say spokesmen from Nautilus, takes the muscle-strengthening potential of gravity (the principle that makes barbells work) and makes it rotary. In that way, resistance to the force human muscle exerts as it exercises is made uniform throughout the entire range of its motion. The result: optimal stress on muscle; optimum development of its potential. As the weights are adjusted to individual capacity, the machines can be made to suit the proverbial 98-pound weakling or the exquisitely tuned muscle of the professional athlete. Then they can be readjusted for each as muscle tone improves.

The company advocates a simple formula for the most effective use of its machines, based on research done at their own labs. Nautilus fitness training requires surprisingly little time: brief workouts three times a week (with a day-long rest in between each workout) for no more than forty minutes at a stretch works best, they say. Within six to eight weeks there should be noticeable improvement in muscle tone.

Advanced trainees should only work out twice a week, pushing more weight during twenty- to forty-minute exercise periods. The general rule of thumb for both advanced and beginning trainees is that if twelve repetitions of a single exercise can be accomplished easily on a given machine, then the amount of weight that the machine supplies should be increased. If less than eight repetitions is all the trainee can manage, then the weights are too heavy and should be lessened.

The new national mania for fitness with

store-bought accouterments has caused the company, which sold its first machine in 1970, to blossom. Its rate of growth seems to burgeon in direct proportion to the increased strength of its converts.

A newly constructed factory in Independence, Virginia, and a supplementary plant in Texas ship Nautilus machines out to customers at the rate of about 350 per week. To date, 2,500 professional health clubs in this country are fitted out with a complete line of the machines (a line consists of 14 machines), an investment of about \$40,000 for each club. Countless others have installed Nautilus equipment in conjunction with other top-selling strength training apparatus.

George Hamilton, who discovered Nautilus at the Aspen Club about two months ago, is in the process of installing four of their machines (two to condition the upper body; two for the lower) in his Aspen home, which incidentally, is also equipped with a sauna and a discotheque.

"Nautilus equipment is the best I've ever used, and I've trained on them all. It works far more efficiently than anything else I've tried," says Hamilton.

Hamilton is not alone. Beau Bridges trains on Nautilus equipment, as do the New York Yankees, Billie Jean King, the Green Bay Packers, swimmer Diana Nyad, Sylvester Stallone and a host of other professionally superior bodies. Baseball player Freddie Lynn of the Boston Red Sox publicly credited Nautilus for his 1979 American League batting title. Hospitals use the machines for physical therapy. High school and college athletic coaches swear they enhance the prowess of their charges by increasing their strength. The Nautilus people tell a story about starting a local high school weight lifting team from scratch, training them on Nautilus equipment. They say that the team has yet to be defeated, four years later.

The sale of the machines is making Nautilus a very, very rich privately held company. This is an exception in the sporting-goods industry, which, as a whole, is reported to have hit new lows in both sales and profits last year. There are no collection problems, since 50 percent of

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the price of each machine is required in advance and the balance is due on delivery. The average cost per machine is \$2,500. That should be making Arthur Jones, the eccentric genius who invented the system and the prime mover of its sale and manufacture, rich, too. He swears it isn't.

"I don't make money, I reinvest," he says. "When you make money, you have to pay taxes."

Arthur Jones is the man at the hub of the crazy, kaleidoscopic empire that comprises the Nautilus operation, which is headquartered at Lake Helen, on Florida's east coast. The town is noted for nothing at all. The mossy, sparsely populated place is overhung with vegetation, and is the prototype for any Florida town that tourism has completely passed by. Jones likes it that way.

"I do not socialize, ever," he says. "I have almost nothing to discuss with most people. What's the point? You don't discuss the color of a sunset with a man born blind."

Nobody knows how old Jones is, though an educated guess would have him hovering around the age of sixty. His rounded shoulders, sunken cheeks, rheumy eyes, gravel voice all belie the fact that he is virtually a human dynamo, an insomniac, who needs no more than four hours of sleep in any given night.

"From the neck up, he looks seventy," one of his employees laughed. "From the neck down he looks thirty. Average that out and you probably have his real age."

Jones talks like a *carny barker*. His manner is *grandiose*. His style is a melange of Cracker snake-oil salesman and Midwestern evangelist, with a political ideology that is, by his own admission, "just to the right of that of Attila the Hun." He thrives on his own eccentricities. For fun, he raises

crocodiles and poisonous snakes, and he has a fleet of planes at the ready to indulge his dual passion for aeronautics and swift movement from place to place.

There's a *Colt pistol* on the seat of his car at all times. ("Most people believe in a benevolent Providence," he is fond of saying. "I believe in a practical Hartford. That's where the Colt factory is.") There's a 19-year-old Barbie doll of a girl at his side just as often. Her job is to demonstrate Nautilus machines on videotape. She will be a sort of human logo for the company. Things have not yet reached the point where there is much for her to do, so she sits, stands and walks next to Jones, patiently awaiting instructions that are rarely issued. Terry Brantner is as much a part of the image that Arthur Jones would cultivate as she is nestled under his wing, an innocent to be protected.

"When I walk into a restaurant with Terry on my arm," he says, "The local thieves' guts growl." He looks pleased.

"The only three things of value are faster airplanes, younger women and bigger crocodiles," he crows at every given opportunity. "Not necessarily in that order."

Jones's fourth wife, Eliza, is 36 years old. They met while she was selling tickets at an air show in Kissimmee, Florida, when she was 19. The day after their meeting he asked her to go with him to New Orleans. She went, and they were married.

Eliza has raised Arthur Jones's three children from a previous marriage, though none of them is much younger than she. She is currently doing the same for a young cousin, a teenage girl who has been sent to the house to live. Though the Jones children, two sons and a 27 year-old-daughter who is a doctor in New York, are grown, they visit often. The son, Gary, who is 28 is a crash rescue expert in Orlando. The other, 24 year-old-Edgar, works at Nautilus.

"I don't believe in inherited wealth," Jones likes to tell reporters. "When I die, I will leave nothing to my family."

"Arthur would never actually do that," Eliza Jones stated with absolute confidence. She is also completely unconcerned with the picture her husband and Terry Brantner present as they shuttle around town together.

"Arthur doesn't have the normal quota of inhibition," says Eliza. "His restraints are never based on fear. He simply doesn't care whether people like him or what they think of him."

Jones's image, which is based largely on bombast, and which has been almost as carefully engineered, as his exercise machines, is in sharp contrast with his physiology, which is conversely unimpressive. He's a slight man, not very tall. His dark hair has just passed the point of receding, and is very likely dyed. Vanity manifests itself in his character in odd ways. His clothes are rumpled, chosen with deliberate unconcern for anything but utility. In fact, everything about Arthur Jones's personal style is pared down, stripped to the essentials. When he drinks coffee (and he drinks buckets of the stuff), the saucer is discarded as irrelevant. When he eats, there is none of the pleasure of gourmandizing in the action. Grilled cheese sandwiches are served up on the coffee cup's saucer. Plates of pork chops with mashed potatoes drowned in gravy are staples of his diet.

Jones was a Depression child, born in Arkansas, raised in Oklahoma. His parents were both doctors, and six other members of his immediate family are doctors, too, including some of his brothers and his daughter. He says his father was a saint, but he neglects to talk about his mother.

"Arthur was a baby when his mother was going to medical school during the Depression," says his wife. "He wasn't raised, he just grew."

He claims to have begun leaving home at the age of 8, in search of someone to talk to. "By the time I was 14, I associated exclusively with people in their late thirties and early forties. I was, and still am, totally disinterested in my contemporaries."

As nearly as one can piece his history together (Jones is characteristically unconcerned with chronology), Arthur Jones made a living selling imported animals and snakes to zoos, pet shops and carnivals in the late Thirties and Forties. During the Fifties he owned and operated a bush airline in South America, and somehow managed to make 300 animal films for TV, including a *National Geographic* feature called "Wild Cargo." In the Sixties he had both an elephant preserve and a game farm in Kenya.

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The Nautilus headquarters sits at the end of a country road. The architecture of the place is strictly pre-fab. There's nothing remarkable about it. The offices are utilitarian, stale-smoky, compact and efficient, filled with all the calm of an airport on a holiday weekend. Executives of the company never sit in the offices for long. There are too many potential sales to be clinched; too many bargains to seal while the memory of an impressive, computerized exercise research lab is fresh in the visitors' minds.

Just behind the offices, not 200 yards away across a dirt field, is Arthur Jones's brainstorm, his baby, his winner-take-all gamble hatched from the corporate nest egg his exercise machines provided. There, concealed behind an enormous, aluminum-siding camouflage (constructed so as not to subject the ovoid structure within to vandalism by locals) is a \$70-million-dollar-plus video-production facility that will, to quote one of Jones's more outrageous statements, "Make the Vatican look like an out-house."

If Jones's gamble pans out, the 200,000 square foot, two-story, concrete technological marvel will house seven control rooms, nine studios and will provide videotaped programming to be broadcast to special interest audiences via satellite on cable TV or on video discs to an audience of millions.

What will ultimately be called. "Nautilus Network" started in a small way: Jones wanted to be able to videotape the training principles he has developed for Nautilus for the health clubs and athletic coaches who use the equipment. But nothing Jones touches stays small for long. His plan now is to develop programming on videotape that will cover every facet of education, from the elements of math to how to cook a pot roast or perform an appendectomy. He plans to videotape programs that will fully inform patients about surgery they will undergo so that the consent forms they sign will be truly informed consent, thereby narrowing the chance of ensuing malpractice action. Jones claims his dream has unlimited marketing horizons.

"I will own the video self-help mar-

ket," he states baldly and with no hesitation whatever. "I will be bigger than General Motors and twice as profitable."

The new studio is his passion; video tape and its cost-efficiency his credo.

"We're going to produce something for everyone," he says. "We're going to produce the software for both RCA and Sony. We're going to do for the video disc what Henry Ford did for cars. We're going to translate every language in the world into every other language. We're going to do a series on prenatal care, and then produce five shows a week on the child that's born, for the first ten years of its life—2,600 episodes. The child, born in front of our cameras, will be the best-known kid in the world."

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"We're not going to broadcast, we're going to 'Narrowcast,'" says Jones. "Our programming will be sent up to the RCA satellite or the Western Union one, and then we'll bounce the signals back to be picked up by TV stations. The average homeowner will not be able to hook up to our programming. We're going to create our own network of people who can receive our feed. That's why we don't require an F.C.C. license."

"The three networks have a total \$4.2 billion gross," he explained to underscore the viability of his projections for Nautilus Network. "Motion pictures have an additional \$1.9 billion. The music business—\$3.9 billion. That's a total of \$10 billion for entertainment, and that's a lot of money. But the how-to-market is a \$27.2 billion market. It's not so visible as entertainment, but it's a lot more profitable. It is my intention to own it outright." Despite (or because of) the bravura, the posturing, the almost childish glee with which Jones greets

any challenge—or any opportunity to express righteous indignation—he has managed to elicit the loyalty and affection of his close associates.

Nautilus's General Manager is Ed Farnham. His provenance is the sale and promotion of the exercise machines. Farnham has been a football player. He is a consummate salesman, and he has been selling Nautilus for seven years, working closely with Jones all that time. He claims that he has never met Jones's intellectual equal. (Everyone who knows Jones agrees.)

"Arthur Jones is Nautilus," he said. "He has an I.Q. that registers somewhere between 190 and 210. He has a logical mind. Arthur can go home with every book on any given subject on Friday night, and come out conceptually understanding it better than the authors on Monday morning. That's why the machines work. And it's why the company works, too."

David Liskin, video-operations manager of the incipient taping facility, seems even more under Jones's sway. He's a transed New Yorker in his late twenties, whose career as an Olympic runner halted some two years ago. That brought him to Jones's attention and into his employ. At the moment, Liskin is living at Lake Helen, taking most of his meals with Jones at Mr. K's, leading a life that's totally wrapped up in video tape and Jones's elaborate schemes for greater success. Liskin's opinion of Jones is unqualified: "I think he's a genius."

How does Jones manage such glowing personal endorsements? "Most people have never been treated with respect," he says. "I offer people that, plus the ultimate opportunity: to make 'em rich."

There is considerable buckle in Arthur Jones's swash. The romance of his past and his present eccentric demeanor are applied with a trowel to cement his renegade image. Despite all of that, Jones is an appealing character. He tells you what he's going to do, which components of his act he's about to perform, and then he does it.

"People don't mess with lunatics," he told an interviewer. "That's also true of geniuses. But it's easier to convince people you're a lunatic. The appearance is the same; the effect is the same. They leave you alone. That's an original quote."