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RIDE HIGH

MAGAZINE.COM

EMMA BARRY'S CYCLING TAKEAWAYS

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THE AT-HOME BOOM

HI-TECH, HI-TOUCH AT THE PURE GROUP

MEMBERS WILL STAY WITH YOU FOR
YOUR PEOPLE, SAYS CEO COLIN GRANT

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ITS NEW CYCLING
PROGRAMMES IN THE LAB

ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

A SEGMENTED OFFERING HAS
BOOSTED CYCLING CLASS
OCCUPANCY AT NUFFIELD



THE ONLINE MAGAZINE FOR ALL INDOOR CYCLING LOVERS



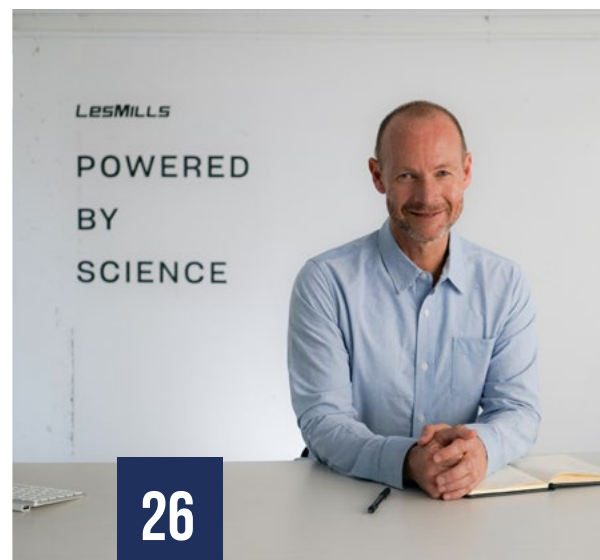
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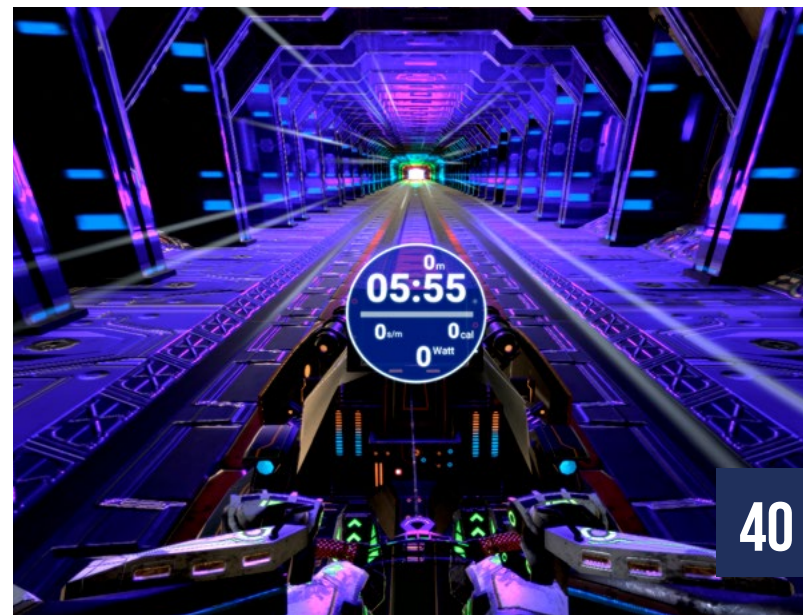
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CONTENT & CONTRIBUTIONS

Have a great indoor cycling story you'd like to share? From studio successes to new innovations – and everything in between – we'd love to hear about it.

Do you know of any super-star cycling instructors? We'd love to tell their stories, so please introduce us!

And if there are any other topics you think we should cover in Ride High, please let us know.

All ideas are welcome –

 info@ridehighmagazine.com

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Harnessing the appeal of cycling Grand Tours for engaging themed classes – that's just one of boutique operator Digme Fitness' eye-catching strategies. Fitness industry observer and cycling enthusiast David Minton climbs into the saddle for its recent Tour de France event

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AT THE PURE GROUP,
WE TALK ABOUT BEING
HI-TECH AND HI-TOUCH
- COLIN GRANT



COLIN GRANT

Immersive, gamified cycling; sleep as the next wellbeing trend; and the launch of an in-club boutique concept. The founder and CEO of Asia's Pure Group talks to Kate Cracknell

How would you describe The Pure Group?

The Pure Group is a premium lifestyle brand whose vision is to inspire and help people to lead healthier, happier lives.

Our health club brand is Pure Fitness: large, premium clubs with a full offering across the board of programming, facilities and member experience. We're very happy with the big box model. People aren't one-dimensional, and the size of our facilities gives us the space we need to meet all expectations when it comes to wellbeing. It allows us to create a true 360° offering and gives us the flexibility to innovate and adapt to new trends.

It was eight years ago, for example, that we first introduced a large, turfed functional training area into one of our Pure Fitness clubs in Singapore; five years ago that we brought gymnastics to the gym floor in Hong Kong; 10 years ago that we started incorporating large lounge areas to promote a sense of community. We're constantly looking to break down barriers, innovate, try new things. We try to look ahead and anticipate customer needs.

And Pure Fitness is just one part of our Group. Meanwhile, Pure Yoga – which, as a standalone offering, was in itself quite innovative when we first launched in Hong Kong in 2002 – offers

every style of yoga, as well as meditation.

We have in-house nutritionists in Hong Kong and are expanding the team in Singapore and Shanghai too; alongside our healthy-eating noodle food brand, this is an area we will continue to develop and grow. For example, we're currently looking at options for home delivery of meals, in combination with personal training.

We've also brought in a sleep specialist recently and are already looking to recruit a second. Sleep is critical to wellbeing, but today sleep is where nutrition was 10 years ago: in a few years' time, the invaluable contribution it makes to our health won't even be questioned, but at the moment people are only just starting to really pay attention to it. I'm very excited about this field – it's going to be a big one for us.

In fact, our sleep specialist and our nutritionists are already looking to work together to develop programmes which, combined with special yoga classes and personal training, will offer members a holistic package to improve the quality of their sleep.

Across our Group, then, we aim to have all the elements in place to help people live healthier, happier lives, delivering it all at a premium level and with great customer service. ▶



➤ Cycling is just one element of The Pure Group's offering, which also includes nutrition (above), apparel (above right) and yoga (below)



► **How have you kept your cycling offering competitive as the boutiques have emerged?** Around 26 per cent of our gym members take part in group exercise. Of those, around 20 per cent do group cycling, so it's an important element of what we offer.

Back in 2015, we launched the world's first 270° Les Mills TRIP studio – the immersive cycling experience [[read more here](#)] – at one of our clubs in Hong Kong. That's done incredibly well, to the point that we now put it in wherever we have the opportunity: we've already done similar installations in Singapore, as well as two clubs in Shanghai.

In fact, we're still the only operator in the world to have 270° screens – there are four in the world and we have all of them. But I absolutely believe it's worth the investment: with the screen all around you, you're totally immersed in the experience. People love it: most of our TRIP classes have waitlists and it's attracting

even those who wouldn't normally be drawn to cycling. We also offer it as part of the membership – there's no extra charge for TRIP classes.

We're experimenting with cycling studio design at our new club in Singapore too, with a tiered atrium-style layout, best-in-class sound system and far more scope to add interesting lighting effects. We then have the option to replicate and retrofit this into our other cycling studios.

Another new initiative is a collaboration with Technogym at our newest club, One Taikoo Place in Hong Kong, which opened in August of this year. Every one of our clubs has a different feel, a different personality, and at One Taikoo Place we've brought gamification to the gym floor. We've created a gym floor zone – equipped with Skillbikes, Skillmills and Skillrows – where we run competitive virtual triathlons: cycling, running and rowing. It's created a real buzz, with some great member feedback already.

**WE HAVE TO ACT SMALL,
HUMAN-SIZED, ENSURING
THAT EVERY MEMBER IS
LOOKED AFTER**

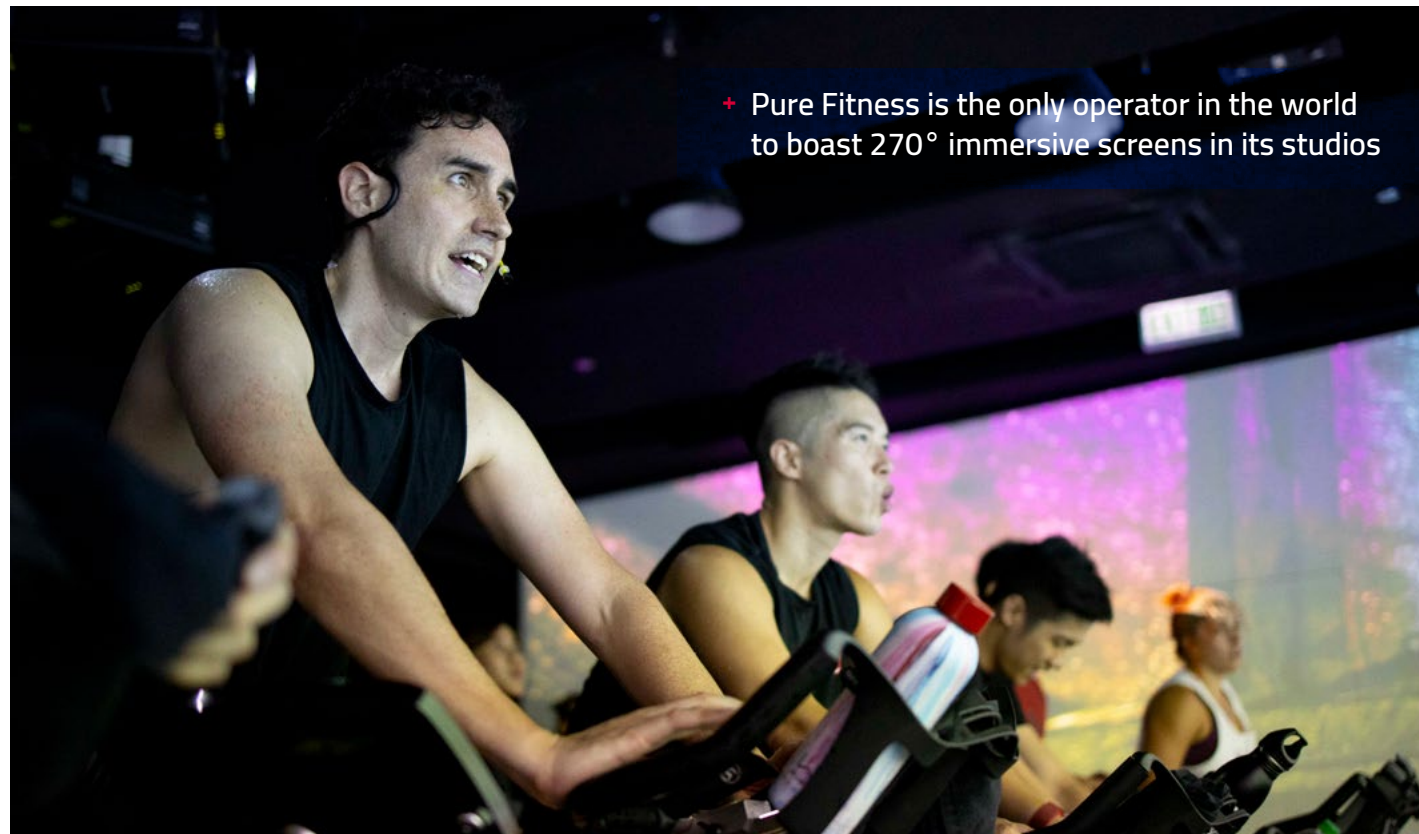
How important is technology to delivering the experience members want nowadays?

It's one aspect, certainly, but not the only one. At The Pure Group, we talk about being hi-tech and hi-touch: personal interaction is key, especially at the premium end of the market.

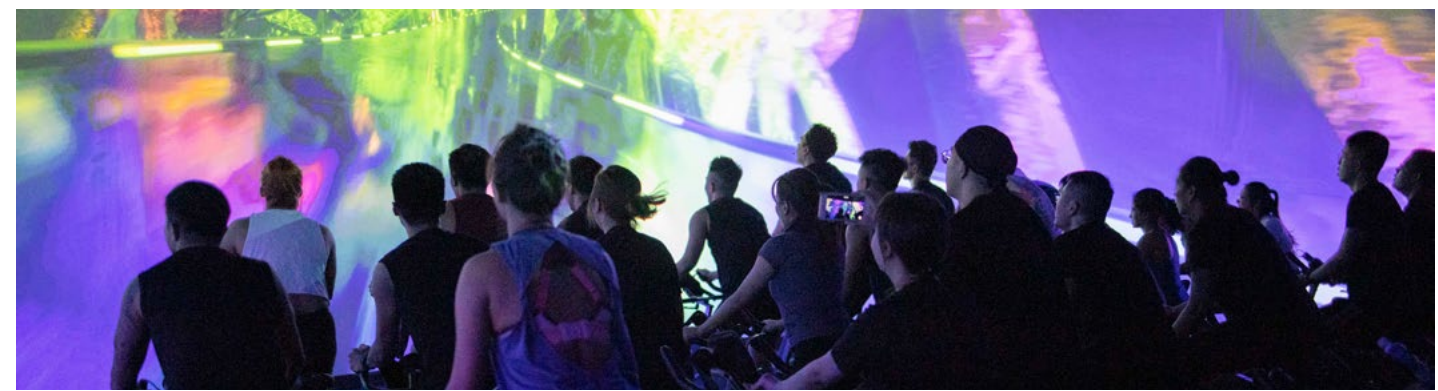
In the case of indoor cycling specifically, you have to bear in mind that – while innovations such as the TRIP bring new people to the discipline, and while great lighting for example will engage people – there are some hardcore cyclists who just want to get on a bike and go... and it will be these people who will still be with you in 10 years' time. The trick is to cater for both groups without being gimmicky or short-term, understanding that what really keeps people coming is the quality of the instructor. You need instructors who love what they do.

We do bring in technology where we feel it will enhance the member experience. We launched our Innovation Lab a couple of years ago, where we test new products in our clubs. It gives our members a chance to try out the latest innovations, provides great feedback for the supplier, and allows us to trial the latest products before we commit.

We've also built our own software – it's been a three-year project – which we're calling Pure 360. It's our own club management system that's integrated with both a member app and



+ Pure Fitness is the only operator in the world to boast 270° immersive screens in its studios



► a staff app. This will further enhance in-club interaction, as well as providing personalised support out of the club. If you book a yoga class in the club, for example, mypureyoga.com – our online virtual class platform, which will also be integrated into Pure 360 – will recommend complementary, online classes run by the same instructor.

**IN SELECTED LOCATIONS,
IN-CLUB BOUTIQUES
WILL OFFER HIIT, CARDIO,
FUNCTIONAL AND BOXING**

But equally, there's some evidence of tech fatigue nowadays: many people like to come to the gym to escape their screens for a while. So, what matters are our staff: 90 per cent of our staff are customer-facing and they're there to provide the personal contact – across the 25,000 visits to our clubs every day – that will keep bringing those members back.

They also lie at the heart of our community, which even outside of our clubs goes far beyond the online realm. We run events, we organise wellness retreats, we form tribes – Latino Familia, the Handstand Clan and so on – who are all united by a particular interest.

The way I always explain it, our size can be an advantage and a disadvantage. The key is to not act big. We have to act small, human-sized, ensuring that every member is looked after so well they feel like they're the only person in the club.

To what extent have you embraced the at-home fitness market?

We obviously have mypureyoga.com, and our app will allow us to provide members with at-home workouts and support. But, while we have of course noted the growth of Peloton and the at-home market generally, at this stage we aren't venturing into our own hardware. It's still

very early days in this field, and hard to know who's really doing it well.

We also have more than enough to keep us busy in our existing business. We only have 36 clubs – of which 34 are operated by us – so there's plenty more growth opportunity for our club model.

While we would never open new locations for the sake of it – they will always have to be great locations and a great space, allowing us to create a fantastic club – I expect to open a dozen more clubs in Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai and Beijing over the next 12 to 18 months. We're certainly finding that landlords

are now actively looking to bring wellbeing brands into their developments above, for example, the big retail brands.

Any other new innovations at The Pure Group?

We're seeing a trend towards the creation of boutique studios inside big box gyms, and we're currently exploring options to develop something similar for our own clubs. We'll be looking to launch this new concept in selected locations in Hong Kong, Singapore and Shanghai.

These in-club boutiques will offer a mix of disciplines – HIIT, cardio, functional, boxing – with a range of programmes on offer. These will be ►



▶ both adaptations of our own small group training concepts, as well as hand-picked pre-choreographed sessions.

Would you consider opening standalone boutique studios?

We've considered it for a long time, contemplating what we might do that would complement our big boxes, but in the end you can't be all things to all men.

There's also the question of where we are in the boutique lifecycle. I wouldn't like to hazard a guess, but if even the big brands like Flywheel are closing sites... perhaps we're better off staying focused on our big box model. While I don't like to play it safe, and will always experiment with new ideas, I certainly don't feel compelled to jump in and do something just because everyone else is.

It's also the case that you get a much better

deal on a lease if you want 30,000sq ft versus 4,000sq ft. That makes the small box model a particularly hard one to crack, especially in Asia where rents are already among the highest in the world. Even our Pure Yoga locations – although they have the feel, the energy and the community of boutiques – measure 15,000–20,000sq ft.

What do you believe is the future of indoor cycling?

It will certainly continue to be a big part of the gym experience, but I do believe – all innovation aside – that what will ultimately keep drawing people back won't be lighting or sound systems or décor. It will be better and better instructors.

People will all but ignore the surroundings if they have an instructor they really connect with. That isn't unique to cycling of course, but it is something to keep in mind, and the reason why staff training is always at the top of our investment priorities. ●

ABOUT THE PURE GROUP

Founded in 2002 and headquartered in Hong Kong, The Pure Group is Asia's leading premium lifestyle brand that includes Pure Yoga, MyPureYoga.com, Pure Fitness, Pure Nutrition, Pure Apparel and nood food. Pure Group has locations in Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore and New York – the latter a licence agreement with Equinox.

As at August 2019, the Group catered for over 80,000 customers across 36 sites. Most are either Pure Yoga or Pure Fitness, but one site – Hong Kong's The Pulse – offers both Pure Fitness and Pure Yoga in one location.

The Group's 22 Pure Yoga clubs are located in Hong Kong (12), Singapore (four), Shanghai (three), New York (two) and Beijing (one). Meanwhile, of the 15 Pure Fitness locations, 10 are in Hong Kong, with three in Singapore and two in Shanghai.



▶ The big box model doesn't only mean more variety for members. It also means better leases, says Grant



CYCLING TAKEAWAYS

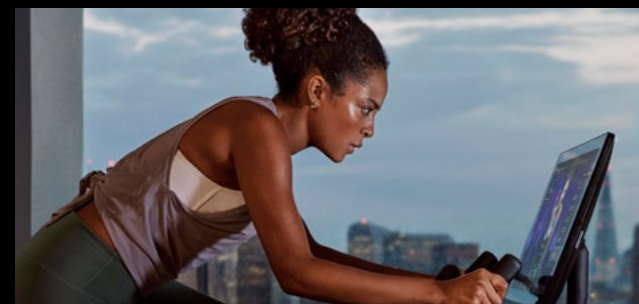
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#1 IT'S NOT ABOUT CYCLING

The best way to think about the future of at-home cycling is to forget about cycling altogether. Think of it as just another service you're passionate about receiving. Think food. Think fashion. Think human behaviour.

Amazon has primed us to expect immediate delivery by drone or robot, Netflix is feeding us intoxicating content based on our preferences, Fortnite has us adventuring off-world with friends. These examples tap the tenets of convenience, hyper-personalisation and community and are showing fitness the way – which brings us to Peloton.



#2 YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE FIRST, BUT YOU DO HAVE TO BE BEST – AND LOUDEST

Reported to have more customers than SoulCycle and better retention than Equinox, Peloton was not the first to deliver at-home workouts by a long shot, riding the slipstream of greats before them – from Jane Fonda to Beachbody's P90X to Kayla Itsines getting more bodies into bikinis than anyone before.

However, what Peloton has done is wheel a boutique fitness experience into the home with a software-hardware-subscription solution that happily touts a 2-foot commute – and which it then advertised, everywhere.



#3 IT'S ABOUT THE BIKE

Cycling is a business basic for the body. It meets our bipedal design in the seat, offers low impact but weight-bearing exercise, easily adjusts for pace and resistance, has you sweating within minutes by dialling to the right, and requires next to no co-ordination.

Boom. A slam dunk for fitness and the reason it has dominated gyms, studios – and our own basements – since 1965.



#4 ... BUT ALSO NOT

Purists now measure up to Zwift, rhythm-riders follow the beat and SoulCycle gets predictably spiritual by using the bike as the vessel to channel riders to find their soul.

► More and more, the indoor bike is less a piece of fitness equipment and more the means to access a range of increasingly personalised workout experiences, both in the club and at home. The result? Those experiences can command a premium – which brings us to point #5.



#5 GIVING EXERCISE VALUE

In the same way SoulCycle placed a higher value on group fitness by raising the price tag per ride, Peloton raised the stakes at home by elegantly connecting experience and community and making it sticky enough to produce startling engagement – an average of 13 rides per month.

Both brands upped the experience in ways customers cared about. Soul offered a personal and communal high never experienced before, and then shouted to the world through its evangelists and stellar PR. Peloton connected riders to live-streamed NYC rockstars, and each other, and then spent massive marketing dollars obtaining brand omnipresence.



#6 THE BIG FOUR

As with boutique fitness studios, there will be a proliferation of business models, price points, delivery mechanisms, programming ideas and bundled services in the at-home cycling market. GAFA – Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple – and others are stepping onto our playing field. They are certainly rubbing their hands together in glee as they prepare to stretch out their long arm of end-to-end product, service and delivery to target unmet fitness consumer needs.

The race is on to own the whole end-to-end supply chain of fitness, and the winner is likely to be he with the biggest database, she with the biggest following, they with the deepest data and pockets. Of the US\$4.2trn global health and wellness market, we are a small bubble and ripe to be picked.



#7 SPARKING INNOVATION

Pricing will always play a part in market growth and at-home cycling is no different. As one of

the key levers, wherever there is a pricing delta, a new business model or player will emerge. Cue Echelon Connect.



#8 CLUES TO THE FUTURE LIE WITH THE TRENDSETTERS

Those who say it's impossible to predict the future would do well to watch the trendsetters, including those who have already shaped the present.

SoulCycle's 20-person digital content team – tapping senior talent from Mashable, Glamour and Vox Media, along with the joint-venture launch of a talent agency with Equinox – shows it is keeping people at the centre of its brand while at the same time as doubling down on its digital expression.

Sound by Soul is one such expression, delivering transformative content through music video, audio and transformative events to complement the brand's studio-based experiences.

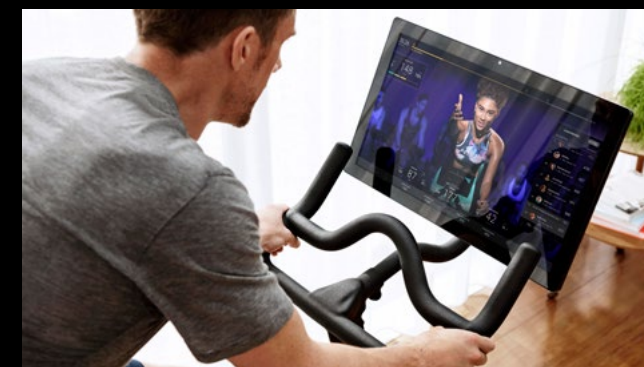
The brand's mission: to delight in new and unique ways.



#9 DONE WELL, TECH IS CRACK FOR ENGAGEMENT

With the accelerating force of AI, and the ongoing development of VR and AR, fitness will soon be as engaging as PlayStation for a 12-year-old boy. The coaching capacity and ability to enhance the experience will be a dimensional shift in exercising. Tech will help take us to dizzying depths of new sensation.

Our biometrics will directly inform our optimal programming and nutrition plan, while personalised nudges throughout the day will keep us in pursuit of optimal health – a journey currently reserved for the rich and athletic elite.



#10 WHAT CEILING?

At-home workouts are just beginning to blow the ceilings off. Clubs and studios are beginning to put digital expressions of their brands into members' pockets in response to the popularisation of Peloton and all its copycats.

► Is at-home fitness here to stay? Absolutely. Is the market big. 100 per cent. At-home options will compete with in-person experiences, at least in terms of frequency.

But it's not a binary conversation. While some consumers will prefer predominantly physical or digital experiences – many digital communities have zealots as addicted to their cause as those that meet in person – most will converse with the greater ecosystem. They will consume content when and where they choose: physically, digitally and everywhere in between.

Which brings us to point #11...



#11 FITNESS IS AN ECOSYSTEM

The fitness customer journey is becoming borderless: physical spaces, digital offerings, online and offline communities, connective elements, crowd-sourced feedback, information and ratings... We're able to move through our lives engaging with what we need, when we need it.

In the process, although we attach different expectations to different experiences, we remain connected to the experience provided the brand

promise is met. We don't go to a concert to hear the perfect sound production, for example – we go to be in the presence of greatness, to rub shoulders with fellow devotees and to be a part of what unfolds on that day only. Nothing beats being there. Fitness is the same. Sometimes we want the knock-your-socks-off fitness festival. Other times we just need to get 30 minutes of cardio done. We morph accordingly.

Brands need to understand and adapt to this broad customer journey, crafting experiences around all the different variables so they perfectly intersect with the natural rhythm of our lives. Those who eliminate pain points and anticipate future needs will be successful in the future.



#12 SEGMENTS ARE BECOMING FINELY DICED

Our desire for hyper-personalisation is being met by finely diced segmentation of products and services. We can now find exactly what we want, exactly how and when we want it. We can choose the community, the instructor, the duration, the intensity, the style, the music, the metrics, the goal, the frequency, the leader board, the chat. Opt in. Opt out. It's up to us.



#13 CONVENIENCE-PLUS

Back to basics: Sick kids, taking a vacation or just good old-fashioned 'I don't have time' make working out at home a welcome option. But while that much has been true for decades, convenience is absolutely the currency of now.

The good news for consumers is that we're in data-led times, with our preferences beginning to drive the products and services that are being served up to us.



#14 FITNESS IS LEVERAGING STAR POWER

Think Mark Walberg and F45, Bieber and Rumble, Mayweather and Boxing, Barry's Bootcamp and the Beckhams, Chris Hemsworth's Centr app.

Expect the same in the digital cycling space as collaborations between databases, delivery mechanisms and stars unite.



#15 ENGAGING ACROSS THE HEMISPHERES

We are now borderless communities, alone-together, engaging on our exact terms with others just like us. Geography is an artificial barrier today.

Personally, my most engaging challenge this year was the MYZONE 5000-MEP January Challenge with my global fitness family. Divided by geography but united in our desire to kick-start the year, we traded on existing friendships, hemisphere rivalry, the transparency of a leader board and the usual flack you'd expect from mates in the chat. I actually won it – predominantly through daily doses of Les Mills On Demand SPRINT, in my office, at home. And I loved it. ●

MISSED PART ONE OF THE SERIES?

For expert commentary on the latest at-home cycling news, and analysis of what all of this means for the future of indoor cycling, read the first part of the series [here](#).



And for more great insights from Emma Barry – this time sharing the secrets of success from the world's leading boutique studios – you can purchase her book, *Customer Engagement in Boutique Studios*, [here](#).



• Rick Crawford

RICK CRAWFORD

As the needs and demands of exercisers continue to diversify, there's a growing pressure to segment the fitness offering – and this is exactly what Nuffield Health has done with its cycling programme.

The operator's head of fitness speaks to Kate Cracknell

"Across the fitness sector, the advent of the boutique studios has forced big box gyms to up their game," says Rick Crawford, head of fitness at Nuffield Health, the UK's leading not-for-profit healthcare organisation. "The boutiques threw a spotlight on the weaknesses of the larger operators, highlighting where they simply weren't up to scratch when it came to group exercise.

"In terms of cycling, for example, it's no longer

enough to have a group of bikes in a traditional studio. That isn't what people want. What people are looking for now is an immersive experience.

"In fact, thanks to the boutiques, this isn't just what they're looking for. It's what they now expect. If we don't have the right product in our gyms, our members want to know why."

Experiential gym floors

He continues: "All that said, our innovation in this area hasn't been a knee-jerk response to



• Nuffield runs more than 2,000 group cycle classes a week

the boutiques. Cycling has long been our most popular group exercise class at Nuffield Health: across our 112 consumer clubs, it accounts for around 15 per cent of all classes – that's over 2,000 group cycle classes each week. Within this, we've always placed huge importance on staying ahead of the game.

"We were one of the first operators in the UK to introduce the concept of wattage onto gym floors, for example, working with Wattbike. Now everyone has it, but when we started five or 10 years ago, people were joining our clubs especially for this. Cycling as a whole was enjoying a boom, driven by the likes of Team GB's Olympic success, and there was suddenly a demand for science to be brought to indoor cycling: wattage, marginal gains, technique to maximise power. A new generation of indoor bikes that far more accurately replicated the experience of

riding outdoors only added to this momentum. And what we were doing at Nuffield Health met all those needs, allowing cycling enthusiasts to train with us in a way that complemented what they were doing outdoors."

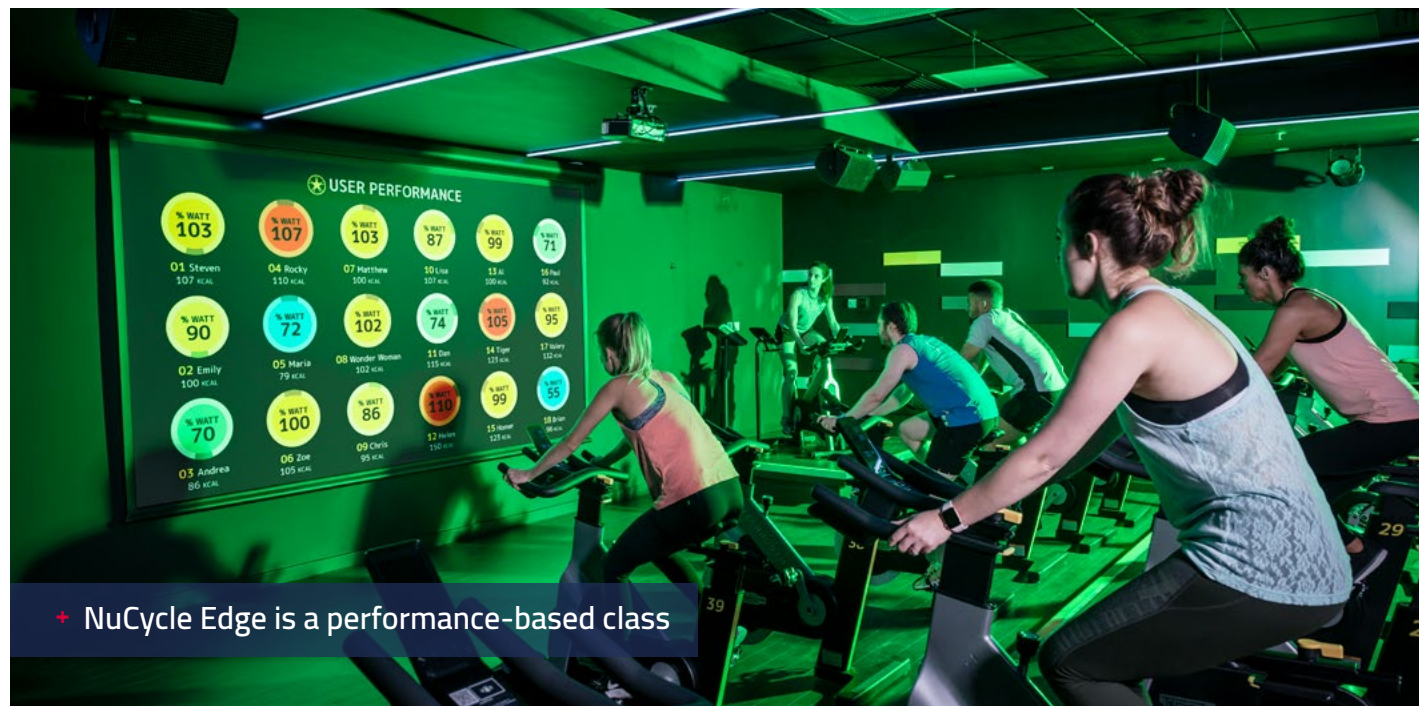
GYM FLOORS AREN'T

JUST ABOUT EQUIPMENT.

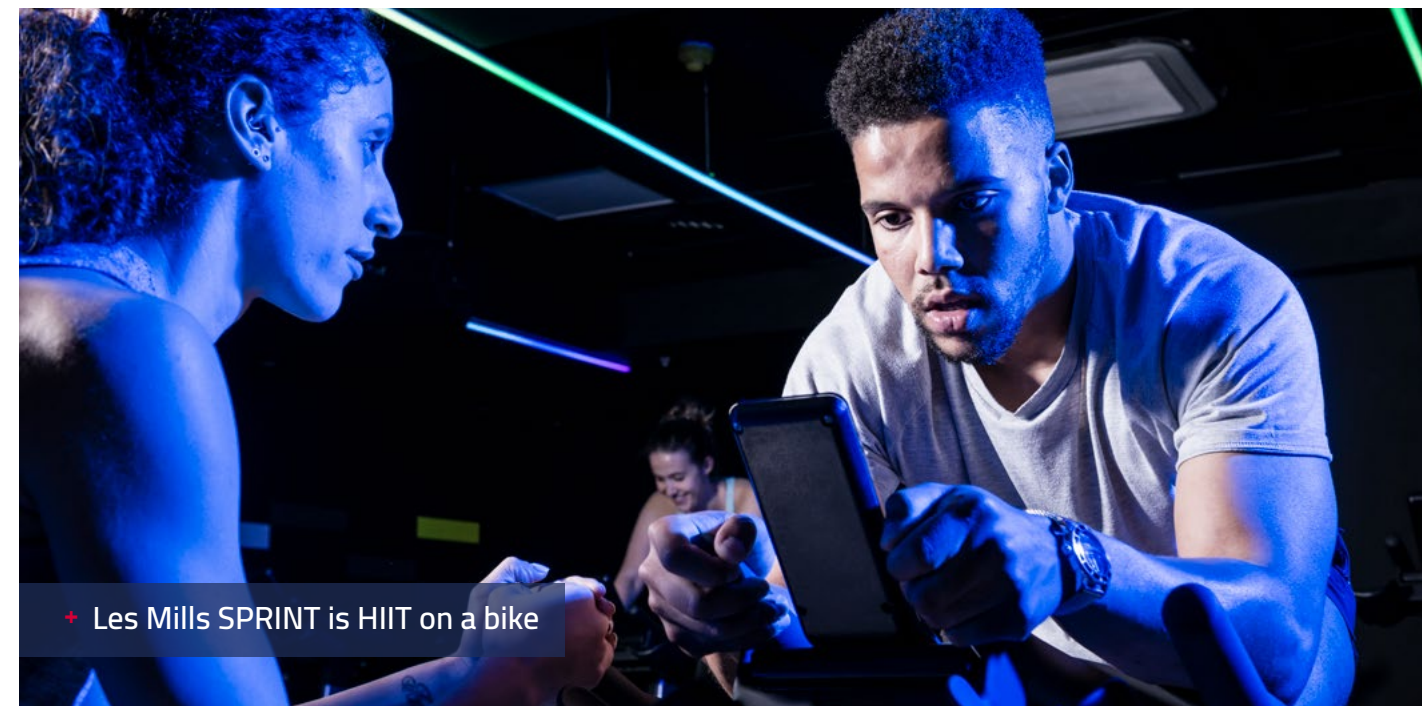
THEY'RE ABOUT EXPERIENCE

AND SOCIAL CONNECTION

Nuffield Health's gym floor model has since continued to evolve, as Crawford explains: "We've made ongoing investments in transforming our fitness spaces, adopting new layouts that encourage people to find the experiences that best suit them. ▶



+ NuCycle Edge is a performance-based class



+ Les Mills SPRINT is HIIT on a bike

► “Within that, there’s a big focus on creating different zones: cycling, rowing, running. We did our first ever zone – which was a cycling zone – around seven years ago and now we’re creating them in every club we can, because gym floors are no longer just about equipment. They’re about the experience too, and about social connection. People don’t want to train alone any more.

“Each cycle zone holds between three and eight bikes – typically Wattbike or Technogym’s Skill-

bike – and can be used for individual training. However, the primary focus is small group training, with typically three or four instructor-led sessions on offer every day. These classes are built around the training modalities of speed, stamina and power, with all of the data from the bikes projected onto a big screen.”

He adds: “To work to their full potential, the zones need human interaction. That’s why small group training is so key. But the other vital aspect is the need to offer a variety of class

types to appeal to different members. Gym floor classes are a great way to get new people to try cycling, so while all the technique and data-focused classes appeal to cycling enthusiasts, we also offer things like HIIT classes for those who just want a workout that will burn through the calories.”

YOU CAN'T JUST DO ONE

STANDARD CYCLING

CLASS AND EXPECT IT

TO APPEAL TO EVERYONE

A segmented offering

This diversity of class offering has also extended into Nuffield Health’s group exercise studios, by way of its NuCycle portfolio of programming. Originally launched in 2017, NuCycle will be available in around 40 of Nuffield Health’s clubs – both consumer and corporate – by the end of 2019.

“Cycling needs to do fitness, performance and exertainment,” explains Crawford, as an intro-

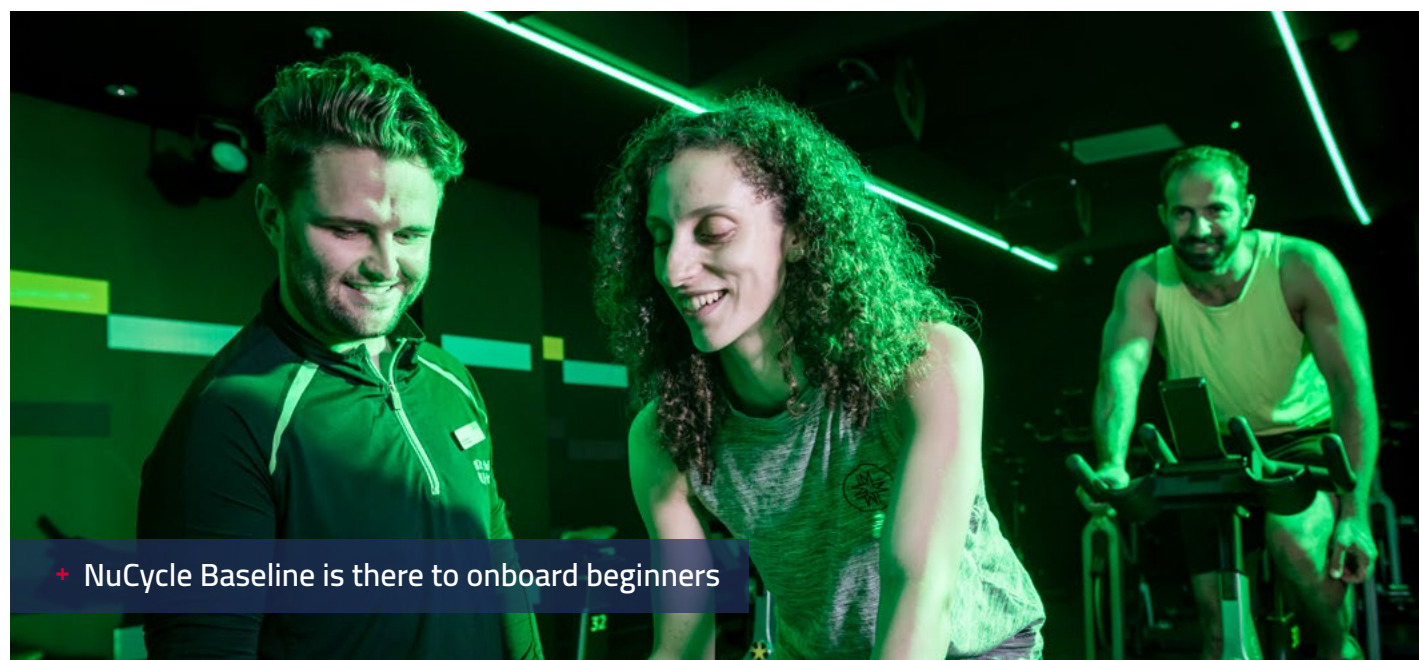
duction to the NuCycle concept. “You can’t just do one standard fitness cycling class and expect it to appeal to everyone. You need a breadth of classes for different types of customer.

“Based on customer research, we came up with six distinct programmes that were not only deemed ‘cool’, but that were also inclusive – very important for an operator like Nuffield Health, where 45 per cent of the membership is aged over 55 years.

“All six programmes are available in all clubs with NuCycle, and start with NuCycle Edge at the performance end of the scale. This class is all about data, efficiency, power, heart rate, competition.

“Then there’s Les Mills’ SPRINT, a 30-minute HIIT class on a bike that’s ideal for anyone looking for an intense workout in a shorter timeframe. Les Mills’ RPM is also in the mix, catering for members who want a traditional fitness cycling class.

“And then we have NuCycle Rhythm, which is most easily explained by comparing it to SoulCycle. We turn off all data, all power monitoring, ►



+ NuCycle Baseline is there to onboard beginners



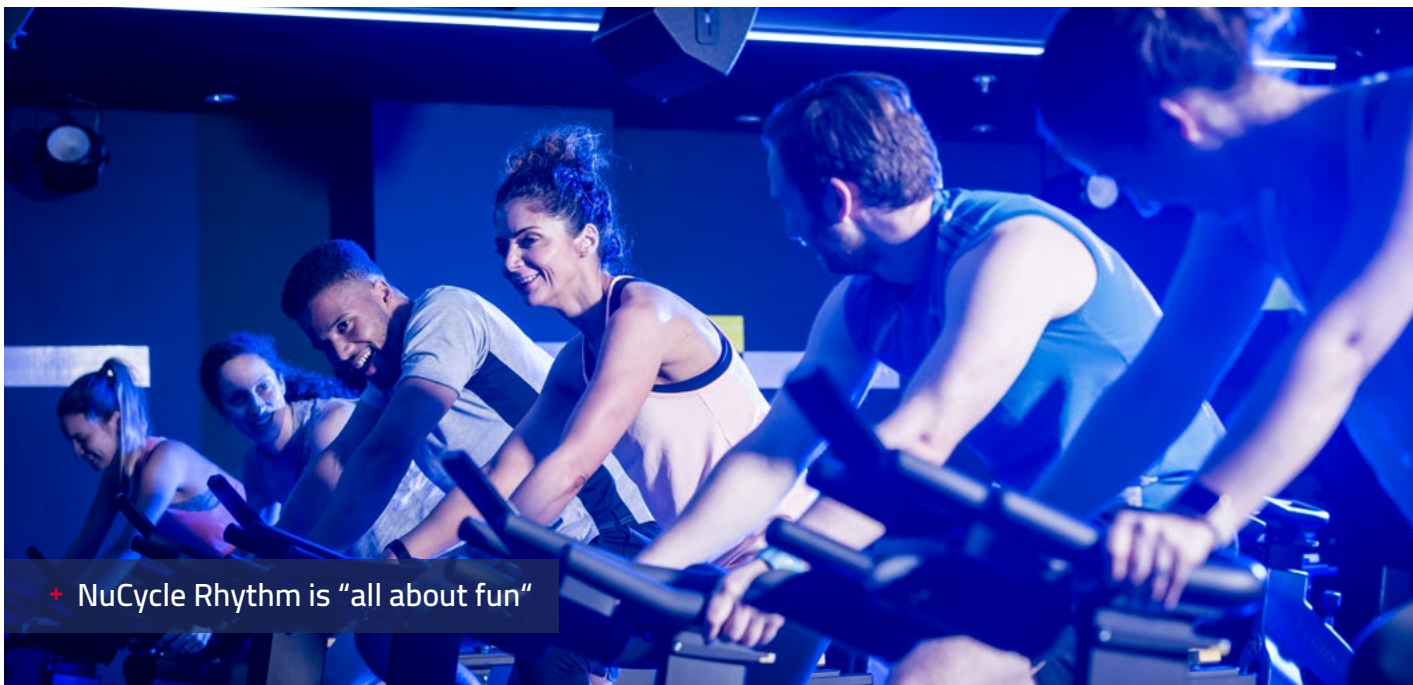
+ RPM is a traditional fitness cycling class

► and there's no hint of competition. Instead, it's all about fun, great music, an enjoyable 45–60 minutes of cycling. It's entertainment. This is where the growth is, attracting new audiences who just want to have fun."

He continues: "The final two classes are NuCycle Baseline and NuCycle Escape. Baseline is there to onboard beginners, getting them familiar with the product – it's a great, inclusive way of getting people started. But equally importantly, Baseline

involves a fitness test. If you're going to do training that's based on power, intensity and threshold, you need to do a fitness test to know where you stand. Baseline is therefore worth doing periodically too, to see how you're progressing.

"Finally, NuCycle Escape is virtual cycling: virtual classes led by an instructor, as well as Les Mills' immersive experience THE TRIP. This is a great category for so many reasons: you can run it all day if you need to, which means far less dead time



+ NuCycle Rhythm is "all about fun"



+ NuCycle Escape transports cyclists into a virtual world

in your studios; it attracts beginners because it's less intimidating; and in our corporate sites especially, where people might be on shifts that mean they can't come to live classes, it means members get to train with the world's best instructors – even at very much off-peak times.

"Interestingly, we're finding Escape also helps us fine-tune our schedules. At one of our big corporate sites, for example, we found so many people coming in for a 3.00pm cycling class that we've now turned it into a live instructor-led class."

What's in a name?

Linking all of these distinct programmes together, the NuCycle umbrella brand is important, says Crawford: "It's not often that Nuffield Health allows for sub-brands to be created, but the business absolutely saw the value of this when it came to NuCycle.

"In a way, it goes back to the boutiques. It was important to create an identity for our cycling offering, with a coolness about it that would stand out in the market.

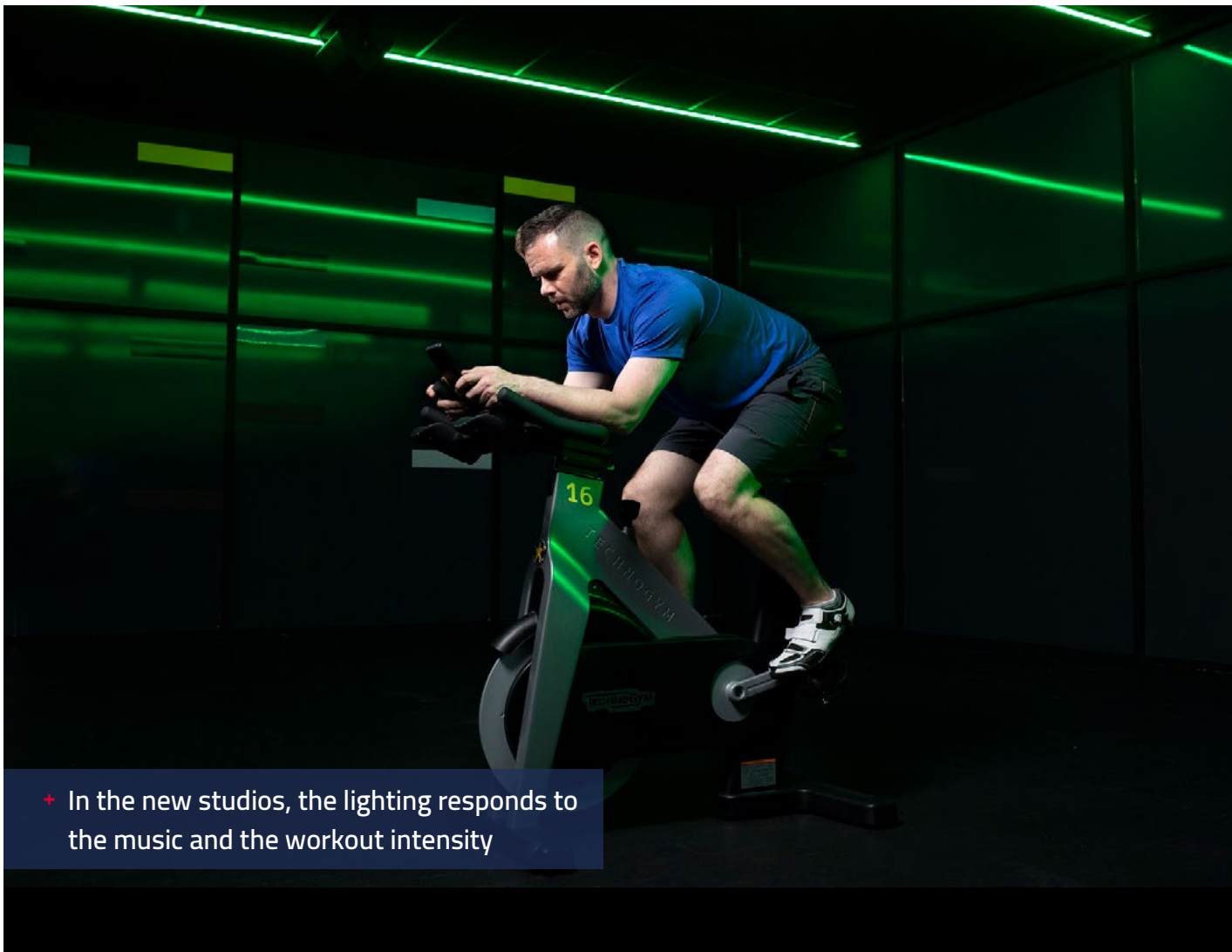
"And NuCycle is definitely one of the coolest

NUCYCLE IS DEFINITELY ONE OF THE COOLEST THINGS WE'VE DONE OVER RECENT YEARS

things we've done over recent years – not just the programming, but the studios too. We've worked with AV specialists to install fantastic sound systems, plus lighting that responds to the music and the workout intensity. Design has gone far beyond the traditional wooden floors and mirrors too, with inspiration coming from all sorts of unusual sources. Some of our studios make you feel like you're cycling on the road, for example, with hi-vis strips running down the walls and dark floors that look like tarmac.

"It all comes together to create a fun, flexible environment that allows our instructors to deliver great classes."

Speaking of instructors, has Nuffield Health found the types of instructor they recruit changing in response to the new class formats? ►



+ In the new studios, the lighting responds to the music and the workout intensity

► “Certainly different instructors perform better in different types of class,” agrees Crawford.

“Edge, for example, requires someone who’s very technique-focused and data-savvy, while Rhythm needs the instructor to be an entertainer. We’re proactively going round our teams looking for highly interactive individuals, who we then train up to be cycling instructors for our Rhythm classes.”

He adds: “I’d actually love all of our fitness staff to be teaching group exercise, whether small group training or studio classes. In my view, while personal training is still important, the days are gone when you could say ‘I only do one-to-one’. One-to-many is the way things have to be now. All trainers need this skillset.”

Limitless potential

So how has NuCycle performed so far? “Exceptionally well,” says Crawford. “In all the clubs where it’s launched, we’ve seen our Net Promoter Scores rise, the number of leavers fall and the number of new joiners increase, with great feedback from staff and members alike. But it’s not just about member satisfaction – we’ve also seen cycling class occupancy levels go up by around 14 per cent.

“Unsurprisingly, then, all the other clubs in our estate are keen to have NuCycle too. We’re looking at how we can roll it out to as many sites as possible over the next few years.

“It’s also entirely possible that we’ll expand the programming choices within NuCycle. There’s so much

we could do here, and this is only going to grow as the fitness demographic continues to segment, with ever more diverse needs that have to be met. Provided we’re able to tap in to a large enough group of members, with a compelling proposition that’s relevant to them and that delivers good outcomes, I see huge scope to launch new classes.

“I can easily see how we might introduce a meditative NuCycle class, for example, targeting emotional wellbeing – this is a huge focus for us at Nuffield Health, where we will have an emotional wellbeing expert in every club by the end of next year. We could have NuCycle Recovery. We could have a joint pain class. We could have a NuCycle class for those with diabetes. We could do something even more targeted around active ageing, as cycling is great for this audience: non-weight bearing, fun and social.”

He adds: “With our medical expertise and direct links to Nuffield Health hospitals, we could work with physios to create programmes for pre- and post-operative patients too. This is where live streaming technology could even come in,

putting our classes direct into patients’ homes. “While we aren’t currently looking at implementing these ideas, there are so many possibilities. I’m always looking for the next thing to ensure we keep up with customer demand across all segments of the population.

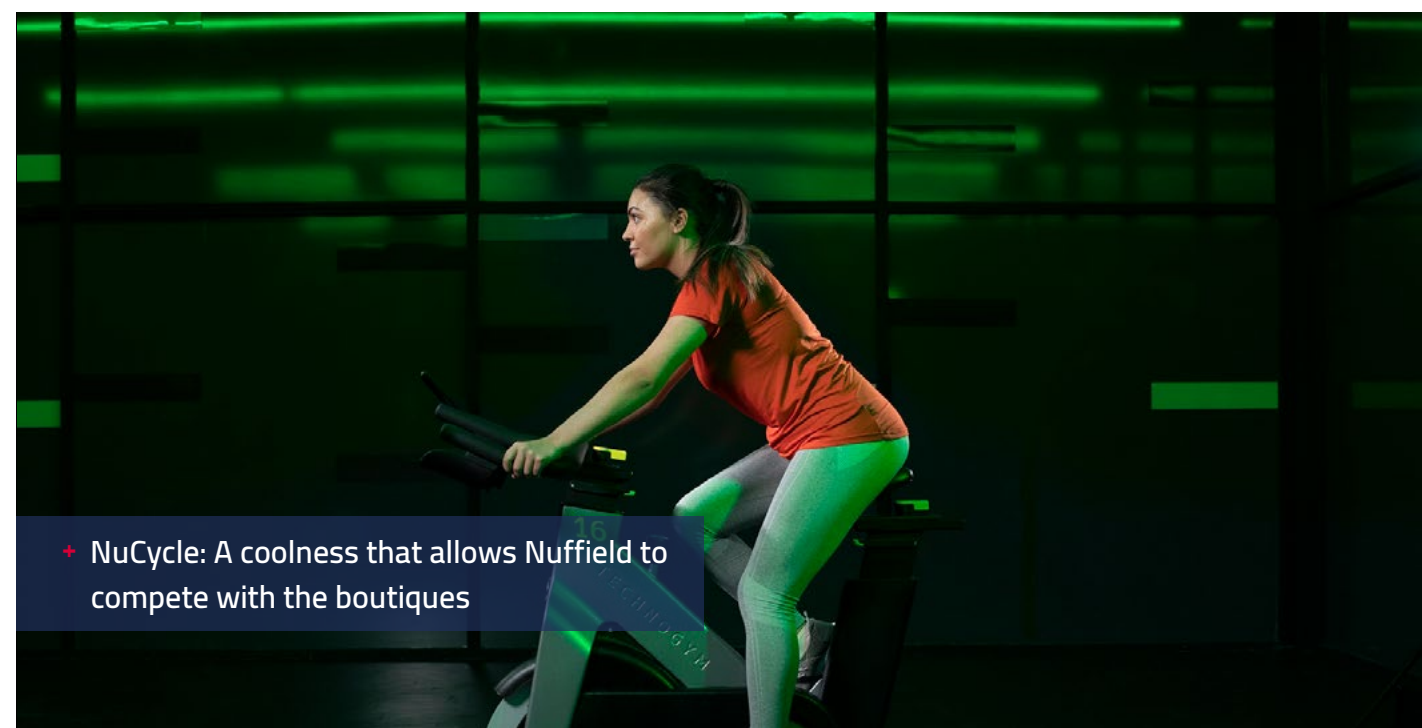
IT’S ALL ABOUT

CONTENT NOWADAYS,

MAKING YOUR CONTENT

AVAILABLE DIGITALLY

“In fact, as a charitable organisation, one of Nuffield Health’s key principles is social impact: how we can reach more of the people who need us. And in this respect, in this digital era, it’s all about content. Not everyone wants to come to a gym, so you have to look at how you can make your content available digitally. Of course, there are only so many new initiatives you can introduce at any one time, but this is definitely something I would like to do.” ●



+ NuCycle: A coolness that allows Nuffield to compete with the boutiques



THE APPLIANCE OF SCIENCE

Les Mills uses science to road-test its cycling programmes. Bryce Hastings, Les Mills' head of research, talks Kate Cracknell through some of the company's extensive studies in the field of indoor cycling



What makes for a great group exercise class? Pose that question to a group of class enthusiasts and you'll no doubt be offered a wide range of answers: great instructors, inspirational music, engaging choreography, exciting AV...

But to focus purely on the experience is to miss one vital factor – and that factor is RESULTS. You might be able to make a class fun, but how many people would do it if they weren't also likely to get fitter, lose weight, improve their health?

That's why, even with its decades of group exercise expertise, Les Mills International continues to invest in extensive research – research to prove the effectiveness of new programmes and establish compelling ways to speak about them, but also studies to help it continually improve existing programmes.

Within this, cycling has been a key focus – and

the research has paid dividends, leading to the successful expansion of Les Mills' portfolio of indoor cycling programming. Now, alongside RPM, cycling enthusiasts can also benefit from HIIT cycling concept SPRINT and immersive experience THE TRIP.

"Our research has highlighted that, by offering a variety of different programmes, cycling can accommodate people of very different levels of fitness and exercise experience," confirms Bryce Hastings, head of research for Les Mills.

And Hastings believes such research shouldn't be left behind the scenes. "Clubs should always be looking for new ways to promote the benefits of cycling to members, and sharing these kinds of research findings is one way to do that," he says.

We take a look at some of the research that shaped RPM, SPRINT and THE TRIP. ▶



**ADHERENCE TO TRAINING WAS
MORE THAN 95 PER CENT
— REALLY HIGH FOR
PREVIOUSLY INACTIVE PEOPLE**



► **RPM: Lowering the risk of heart disease**

“We wanted to investigate whether group cycling could reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease in a group of sedentary individuals,” explains Hastings. “In particular, we were interested in the effects of what we call cardio peak training – varying levels of intensity off a sustained aerobic base.

“We were also interested in whether cycling in groups could improve compliance.”

The study was conducted at Loughborough University in the UK in 2015, and set out to study the effectiveness of an eight-week studio cycling intervention – conducted in a group environment – on improving the cardio-metabolic health of previously physically inactive, overweight adults.

“We hypothesised that VO₂ max, blood lipids, blood pressure, body composition and glycaemic control would be improved following the intervention,” adds Hastings.

The methodology

Eight overweight, physically inactive – defined as doing less than 1.5 hours’ activity a week before the intervention began – but otherwise healthy

volunteers completed eight weeks of supervised studio cycling lasting 20–50 minutes, three times a week for eight weeks.

Participants underwent assessment for maximal oxygen uptake (VO₂ max), body composition, blood lipids, glucose tolerance and insulin resistance before and after the intervention.

The findings

First and foremost, adherence to training was more than 95 per cent – and participants reaped the rewards. VO₂ max (aerobic fitness) increased by 12 per cent, while body fat percentage was reduced by 13.6 per cent. Total cholesterol was reduced by 12.5 per cent, and LDL cholesterol – the type of cholesterol that contributes to plaque formation in the arteries – was reduced by 30 per cent.

“The compliance rate – attending 95 per cent of the prescribed workouts – was really high for this type of group,” observes Hastings. “This was possibly due to the group environment, but crucially, it was instrumental to the success of the intervention in reducing cardiovascular disease risk.”



**“A NEARLY 10 PER CENT
INCREASE IN VO₂ MAX FOR
A GROUP WHO ARE ALREADY
FIT IS IMPRESSIVE”**



► **SPRINT: Get your cycling HIIT**

“We had seen great results from Les Mills GRIT, our series of HIIT workouts that combine high impact bodyweight and resistance exercises,” explains Hastings. “We wanted to investigate whether we could achieve similar results with a non-impact form of HIIT, namely Les Mills SPRINT, which is carried out on a bike.”

Conducted at Penn State University in the US in 2015, this study was based on a hypothesis that a six-week intervention – where trained individuals replaced one 60-minute bout of moderate cardiovascular training with two 30-minute bouts of HIIT cycling – would improve health and fitness more than maintaining their moderate-intensity cardiovascular exercise routine.

The methodology

In this study, 36 trained adults were randomly assigned to one of two groups: Group HIIT or Group FIT.

Group HIIT participants replaced a single 60-minute cardiovascular training session with two 30-minute high-intensity indoor cycling sessions for a period of six weeks. Meanwhile, Group FIT maintained their current training routine.

The researchers measured blood pressure, peak

oxygen consumption, fasting blood profile, body composition and leg strength before and after the intervention.

The findings

The HIIT intervention significantly improved all variables except HDL cholesterol. Peak oxygen consumption and leg strength increased significantly for the HIIT group – these individuals saw increases of 9.7 per cent and 11.9 per cent respectively – but not the FIT group.

Meanwhile, there were significant decreases in the HIIT group for blood pressure (down 9.9 per cent), fasting blood glucose (down 7.0 per cent), total cholesterol (down 6.0 per cent), LDL cholesterol (down 7.8 per cent) and triglycerides (down 16.3 per cent). Fat mass also dropped by 1.1 per cent for the HIIT group.

“I’m always impressed with how fast HIIT works,” comments Hastings. “A nearly 10 per cent increase in VO₂ max for a group who are already fit – in just six weeks – is impressive.”

He adds: “The other reassuring component of this research was that you don’t need to jump around doing high impact exercise to reap the rewards of HIIT training. A class like Les Mills SPRINT is accessible to anyone who wants to take their fitness up a notch.”



**THE STUDY FOCUSED
ON EXERCISE INTENSITY
AND PERCEIVED EXERTION**



► **THE TRIP: Immerse yourself**

“We’ve previously published findings on the various motivation styles instructors might use in a cycling environment,” says Hastings. “These findings indicate that the old ‘bootcamp’ style of instruction may not be the best method.

“One of the key factors that increases the chances of someone adopting an exercise habit is simply a sense of enjoyment. It is this that shifts novices from exercising because they ‘have to’ to exercising because they want to, which in turn makes it more likely they will keep up the habit.”

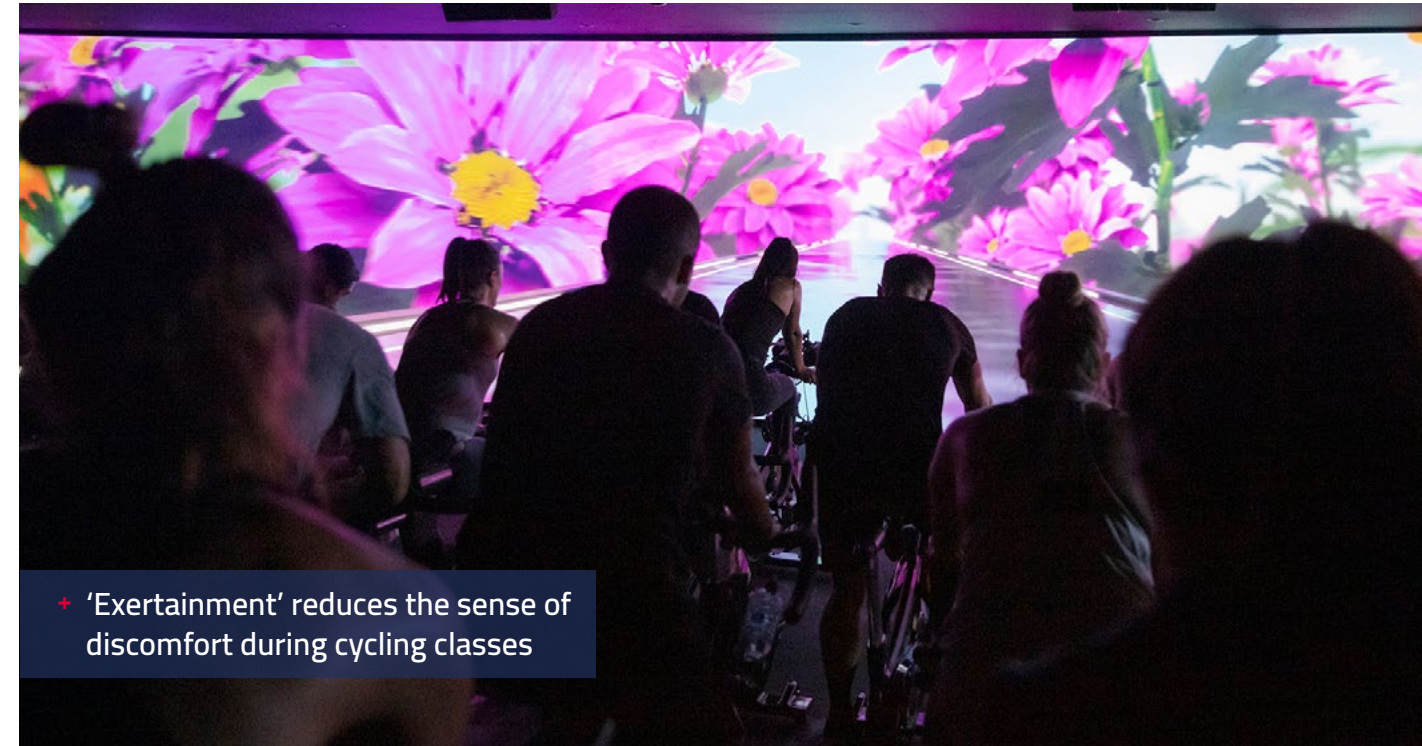
Les Mills was therefore keen to explore new ways of motivating members, and it developed what it believed to be a world-class solution: its immersive, audio-visually spectacular TRIP classes. This

was then put to the test in a scientific study.

“This study was designed to explore what adding this visual experience would do to the cycling intensity, and the perceived exertion of the workout, among novice cyclists,” says Hastings.

“We already had good data that group cycling workouts delivered key health benefits – as noted in the RPM study above – but what effect would adding a visual stimulus have?”

Conducted at Penn State University in 2017, the study therefore set out to investigate the impact of the immersive qualities of THE TRIP – specifically, whether those immersive qualities increased the intensity of a person’s workout without them noticing how hard they were pushing themselves.



+ ‘Exertainment’ reduces the sense of discomfort during cycling classes

The methodology

Tests were conducted on a group of 20 novice fitness participants. Over an eight-week period, they completed eight audio-only group fitness cycling classes and eight immersive classes (featuring digital imagery matched to the music).

The study focused on two variables: exercise intensity and perceived exertion.

The findings

The results showed the novice group’s rate of perceived exertion (RPE) – that is, how hard they thought they had worked out – was less doing THE TRIP than when doing the audio-only class, when in fact the intensity was the same.

“This investigation indicates that THE TRIP is an ideal group fitness environment for relative newcomers, to help them achieve their fitness goals,” says Hastings.

“Cycling studios in general are a great avenue for beginners. There is very little technique involved, so perceived competence levels are high right from the start. But what this research shows

is that adding a visual stimulus can reduce perceived intensity, which we believe can also help beginners. The element of ‘exertainment’ reduces the sense of discomfort and encourages people to adhere to cycling classes in the early stages of developing an exercise habit.”

He adds: “Exercise intensity has been highlighted as a key factor that can impact compliance in early exercisers: if those new to exercise feel they have had to push themselves ‘too hard’, they may be less likely to return. With THE TRIP, they get into a higher heart rate zone to get fitter, faster, but without feeling the discomfort of this intensity level.”

And on this topic, Hastings has further advice to offer beginner cyclists – and the clubs and studios catering for them: “Starting gradually is key, focusing on frequency and consistency before intensity.

“In fact, we’ve found that giving people the licence to leave a class when they have had enough, and slowly adding tracks as they get fitter, helps them establish an exercise habit.” ●



THE DIGME TOUR

Harnessing the appeal of cycling Grand Tours for engaging themed classes – that’s just one of boutique operator Digme Fitness’ eye-catching strategies. Fitness industry observer and cycling enthusiast David Minton climbs into the saddle for its recent Tour de France event

Let’s get the obvious out of the way first. The Tour de France is the most prestigious and possibly the most difficult bicycle race of the Grand Tours: 21 stages over 23 days, just two rest days, and covering around 3,500 km (2,200 miles). Each team has eight riders and the rider with the lowest cumulative finishing times is the leader of the race and wears the yellow jersey.

What’s slightly less well-known is that every year, thousands of amateurs test their overall fitness, cycling skills and nutritional strategy on one of the Tour mountain stages, a few days before the professionals come through. This event is called Etape du Tour and I’ve done two, in the

Pyrenees and the Alps. My first Etape in 2005 was in the Pyrenees, where Col d’Aubisque was the main climb: 17km long, with the summit at 1,709m and a maximum gradient of 13.2 per cent. Training for this event taught me that cycling is all about numbers.

Part of the training for this personal challenge took place at Third Space Soho, where back-to-back cycling classes took place on a Friday evening. Although fun in 2005, I couldn’t measure the result as bikes didn’t have the technology and trackers were not common then. So, during the week, I had a real bike on a turbo trainer using the Billats method of speed, distance, heart

rate and time in the hypoxic chamber set to 3,000m above sea level. Lactate training optimised my lactatethreshold, and over time the 4 x two-minute surges with rest intervals improved my mental toughness and my VO₂ max.

At this time, I also completed my indoor cycling certification at the London Central YMCA so I could start teaching, keen to encourage more ‘mature’ riders. I was also keen to get more from my indoor riding experience wherever I was riding, but the product was inconsistent. With Johnny G having devised Spinning in his garage back in 1989, in the process giving birth to the indoor cycling revolution, I therefore took every opportunity I could to ride with him at IHRSA, as well as on his promotional and educational tours.

Going back-to-back-to-back

Given this background of road racing and being hooked on cycling indoors, I was intrigued to read about the Tour de France-themed classes at Digme, the boutique cycling studios in London and Oxford. Digme’s Tour de France event had been running coterminous with the real Tour (see ‘Digme – United in Fitness’ briefing box) and I had the opportunity to join some special riders on the final Sunday at Digme Fitzrovia.

Of course, indoor cycling classes have taken the boutique and general fitness market by storm;

WHILE THE REAL TOUR WAS RIDING INTO PARIS, I WAS AT DIGME DOING BACK-TO-BACK-TO-BACK RIDES

the talent for developing new cycle concepts seems never-ending, while over a third of private clubs – and slightly higher across the public sector sites – have dedicated cycle studios.

But what stood out in advance was the length of Digme’s ‘Perform Plus’ Tour de France event. On timetables across the sector, the most popular indoor cycling class is 45 minutes, followed by an hour. Very occasionally, programming provides the opportunity to do back-to-back for 90 minutes – but three 45-minute classes back-to-back-to-back, which was what lay in store at Digme... that will be out of most comfort zones and was a first for me. With instructor changeovers and water refills, that’s around 140 minutes in the saddle.

And so it was that, while the real Tour was riding into Paris, I was at Digme being pushed by Paul, Laura and Gareth – the instructors who shared the load through the back-to-back-to- ▶





+ Cycling enthusiast David Minton (front left) climbs into the saddle

back rides. Gareth built the final session into a crescendo of profiles which burnt the calories – over 1,500 in total – and gave me ‘des souvenirs’ of the lactate training programme. Gareth and I also had in common riding with Johnny G in the late 90s.

Numbers vs experience

Digme uses Keiser M3i bikes and Spivi screens, which allows for live data to be transmitted from the bike via Bluetooth and displayed to all in the class. This in turn allows for accurate power-based training, whereby each rider in the class can ride to his or her own level based on FTP (Functional Threshold Power). It’s a great way to ensure every rider is pushed equally, whatever their power output, as well as to track progress.

Interestingly, INEOS – the sole owners of the British professional cycling Team Ineos (formerly Team Sky), whose riders came first and second in the 2019 Tour – uses the same bike-

data-screen combination at its offices and plant in the UK and Europe as part of its corporate wellness offering... where classes are run by Digme’s Gareth. All the elements were in place for a great event.

However, if I might offer some constructive criticism – and appreciating this is just one person’s view – I felt the heavy focus on data rather overwhelmed the class. Of course, the regulars were aficionados of Perform Plus, which is Digme’s data-centric, performance-based class; I may well be a lone voice here! But even though the Etape du Tour taught me that training is about numbers, when it comes to classes such as this, I come from the school of enjoying the moment.

In contrast, I felt that those around me were so focused on the on-screen data that there was no scope to simply enjoy the ride. And while that might be fine in a normal class, when you’re trying to create a special Tour de

France vibe... well, perhaps there might have been scope to do something different with the screen, such as showing Tour de France footage? As someone who has ridden sections of the Tour de France, I would have loved to have been challenged to climb one of the legendary climbs, adjusting my gears to match the incline on the screen in front of me.

As it was, I felt the focus was a little too heavily on data, with not enough to really tie me to the Tour de France itself.

Open your mind

But all that is detail, and as I say just one person’s perspective, and should not take away from what was a very enjoyable event. It was also a thought-provoking one: when I told people I was doing three back-to-back classes, eyebrows were raised, but actually why not? Why not even do four? If you think about it, just one of the big climbs will take you an hour on the road. By comparison, a 45-minute class with just bits of climbing is nothing. Digme therefore has to be praised for this – for opening people’s minds to the possibility.

And Digme delivers all of this in a very achiev-

able way. The Tour de France event wasn’t one long class – it was three separate, back-to-back classes with different instructors, each with their own style. Why shouldn’t other clubs and studios structure their timetables so there are three or four classes in a row, allowing members to do multiple consecutive classes if they wish?

WHY SHOULDN’T OTHER CLUBS OR STUDIOS RUN THREE OR FOUR CLASSES IN A ROW, AND TIE IT ALL AROUND A THEME?

And absolutely, why not tie it all around a theme? There are plenty of other fantastic Grand Tour events to link to; Digme already runs themed classes around events such as the Giro d’Italia. Food for thought for other operators out there.

So, my main take away is this: let’s have more back-to-back programming, and back-to-back-to-back classes at weekends please. Great fun, and thanks for the ride Digme.





+ Geoff Bamber, founder & CEO, Digma Fitness

DIGME: UNITED IN FITNESS

► Geoff, please set the scene: what is Digma all about?

Digma offers a diverse range of world-class, authentic indoor cycling and HIIT classes in an inclusive, community-focused environment – one where you can track and measure your workout.

We're there to help people make a positive change: to be healthier, happier and to achieve their best self. We encourage customers to set their sights high, achieve more than they ever expected and leave feeling exhilarated and in the best shape of their lives.

Whether you want to get lost in the music and ride to the rhythm, track your fitness using data, or experience an exhilarating HIIT class, we have something for you. It doesn't matter if you're a first-timer or a fitness fanatic: we represent fun, accessible fitness where you'll dig deep to achieve your goals.

What was the idea behind your recent Tour de France event?

Digma has a really motivated, inclusive community and we love bringing that community together – especially for a workout!

EACH WEEK, OUR MEMBERS TACKLED A DIFFERENT STAGE OF THE TOUR DE FRANCE

We have some very talented riders who join us for Perform Plus classes – our data-centric, performance-based cycling sessions – week in, week out. We knew they would love to be involved in a series of themed classes based on the Tour de France, taking their workouts to a whole new level.

What did the event involve?

We ran Ride the Tour sessions workouts in our Perform Plus classes throughout July, culminating in a special Tour de France event at our Rathbone Square studio on Sunday 28 July. All sessions were designed by our world-class Perform Plus instructors Paul, Laura and Gareth – themselves impressive cyclists, triathletes and Ironman finishers.

Each week, members tackled a different stage of the Tour de France, with time trials, epic climbs, sprints and challenges to mirror stages of the tour. Stage one – Pau – was an individual time trial. Stage two – Saint Jean-de-Maurienne to Tignes – was short but intense, with lots of climbs. And stage three – Embrun to Valloire – included a trio of classic Tour de France climbs: Col d'Izoard, Col du Galibier and Col de Vars.

There were lots of prizes up for grabs, including jerseys for the furthest distance travelled across the three stages; the most sprint points gained; the highest average watts per kilo on the challenges; and the best young rider (under 25 years). There were also team awards – the furthest combined distance travelled for male, female and mixed teams – and an award for the gutsiest effort during each class. There were also spot prizes of much-coveted yellow socks up for grabs – for best effort made, someone's first class, and so on.

Finally, our 28 July event celebrated the end of the Tour de France with a specially curated 140-minute class. This was followed by a post-workout French-themed party, a Ride the Tour awards ceremony and a screening of the Tour de France finale.

Do you organise events on a regular basis?

On the first Thursday of every month, we run Climb n Cleats in our Moorgate, Richmond and Oxford studios – a 60-minute Perform class themed around a different legendary climb from around the world each month.

We also run themed classes for the major tours, such as the Giro d'Italia.

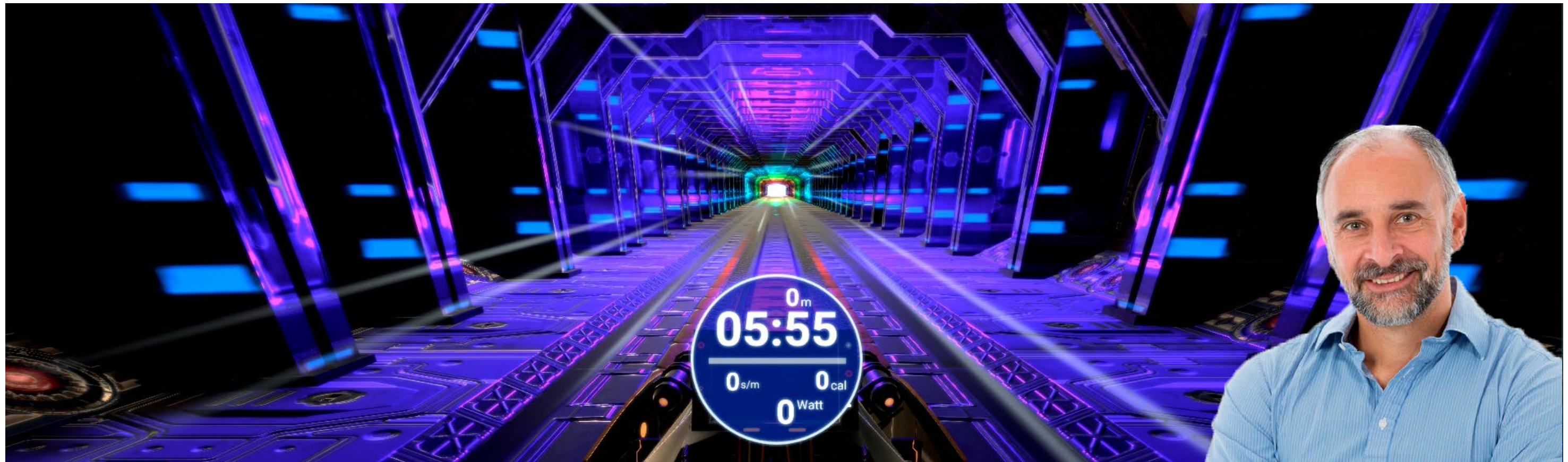
What is the value to the business of events such as this?

Bringing the Digma family together to train is what makes Digma so special, and events are fantastic tools to do this. Diggers are brilliant at bringing fun, energy and enthusiasm to push themselves to new highs.

Digma Fitness currently operates five studios in the UK, with four in London – Rathbone Square, Moorgate, Blackfriars and Richmond – and one in Oxford.

 www.digmefitness.com





FITNESS, REINVENTED

Virtual reality has the potential to revolutionise fitness and democratise indoor cycling – and gyms will have no choice but to embrace the technology. Holodia's Shahin Lauritzen speaks to Kate Cracknell

What is your mission as a company?

Holodia's vision statement is 'fitness reinvented'. Specifically, our goal is to change the way the global sector delivers fitness – and with it the way people experience it – through the use of mixed reality technology.

Our focus is predominantly on VR – virtual reality – through our HOLOFIT brand. But importantly, we are not a gaming company. We're a fitness company.

Neither are we a hardware company – we can't compete with the R&D budgets of the big consumer brands: Oculus, HTC, Samsung,

Lenovo and so on. We're a software company, and our expertise in both fitness and software allow us to deliver new and amazing experiences to exercisers.

What is HOLOFIT, and who is the target market?

HOLOFIT is the most advanced VR fitness platform on the market.

Our primary audience thus far has been the B2B market: gyms and fitness facilities. Why? Because it takes time for new technology such as ours to gain a foothold in the consumer market. People first have to understand how the tech-

nology makes their lives better, different, more fun. We're reaching that point now – we've seen VR sales growing fast over the last few quarters – so the time is now right to reach out to consumers too. We launched a fitness solution that's suitable for home use in July of this year.

But we still have a strong focus on the B2B market. Our goal is to help gym operators solve some of their bigger problems around member engagement and retention, as well as helping them reach and attract new audiences. Crucially, we don't see ourselves as disruptors. We're there to help the fitness sector transform itself, and thereby strengthen its position, by embracing digital technology.

We're also there to help gyms deliver against consumer expectations: the desire for fitness to be an experience; the desire for personal choice in how you train; and the desire to socially interact while you exercise. ▶

Shahin Lauritzen



► **So, how does HOLOFIT work?**

HOLOFIT's virtual reality software runs through a VR headset worn by the exerciser, with two versions available: HOLOFIT PRO and HOLOFIT GO.

Both offer a variety of content – what we call 'tracks' – to ensure personal choice in training style, workout mode and environment. And both deliver social interaction through functionality such as competitions, leaderboards and multi-player mode.

HOLOFIT PRO is designed for a dedicated VR CV zone on a gym floor: a powerful system that allows for premium visual quality. With content driven from an external, VR-ready computer, and as a wired solution, there's no down-time: the headsets are continually charged and ready to use. It also comes with more content than HOLOFIT GO – around 120 tracks, which are regularly updated – and is priced at around €2,100 for the hardware, plus €99 per headset per month for the software and content.

HOLOFIT GO launched at the beginning of July: a wireless option that connects to compatible fitness equipment via Bluetooth. With all content

EVEN ON TOUGH CARDIO EQUIPMENT, THOSE USING HOLOFIT KEEP GOING 2.3 TIMES LONGER

stored in the headset itself, it's a true 'plug and play' product for a flexible VR offering, whether in the group exercise studio, at home or on the gym floor – perfect for clubs that might not have the space or budget for a dedicated VR zone. The price tag is very different too: €850 is the retail price for the headset, plus €9.90 a month for the subscription.

The user experience of both models is highly intuitive. You simply navigate the options in the menu – avatar, training mode, track, group/individual – through your eyes, by looking at the relevant option, then start exercising in an immersive virtual world. It's as simple as that.

What types of fitness equipment is HOLOFIT compatible with?

At the moment, HOLOFIT is only designed for

use on CV equipment, but within that category we're hardware agnostic, compatible with all major equipment brands and all types of cardio fitness equipment. I would go so far as to say HOLOFIT is the only multisport VR fitness product in the world.

That said, we focus primarily on rowers, indoor bikes and ellipticals/steppers, each of which have their own specially designed content tracks. When you look down at your avatar, they'll be doing the same form of movement as you – rowing, cycling, running or walking.

Although technically you could use a VR headset on a treadmill, for safety reasons – you aren't holding on to anything on a treadmill, so with a headset on you might trip – we don't yet offer this commercially. Headsets will evolve in the future to include a small see-through membrane, and at that point treadmills will be an option, but for now we focus on ellipticals; in a VR world, using an elliptical feels like running anyway, especially if it's on equipment like Octane's Zero Runner.

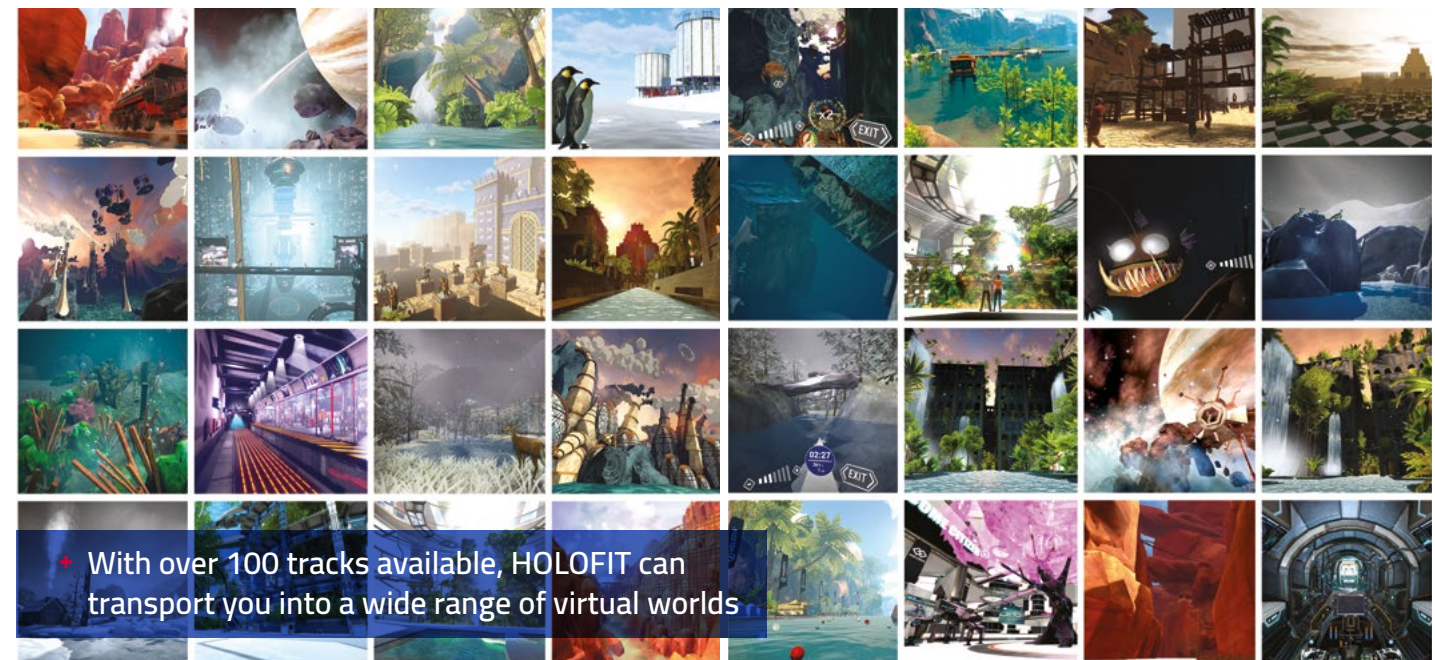
We're already working closely with a large number of leading suppliers – from Core Health & Fitness to Matrix, Body Bike to Concept2 – be-

cause interestingly, what HOLOFIT does is move things on when it comes to CV equipment. At the moment, the price of CV equipment is driven largely by the sophistication of the console, but when you have VR it's no longer about the integrated screen. The combination of user + headset effectively becomes the console: the content, the experience, the social interaction, the competition, the coaching, the heart rate monitoring... it's all done via software through the VR headset. This is an interesting shift in perspective for both operators and suppliers.

Can you use HOLOFIT with any VR headset?

Our software is compatible with most models of VR headset, but we currently recommend HTC Vive or Oculus – as I say, we aren't hardware manufacturers, so we don't make our own VR headsets.

That said, although we're in continual conversations with the various manufacturers to ensure their products meet our high-spec requirements, we're still waiting for the hardware to catch up with what we want to do – what our software could already do. With that in mind, I wouldn't rule out creating our own HOLOFIT headset in the future. ►



► **With over 100 tracks available, HOLOFIT can transport you into a wide range of virtual worlds**



► **How are gyms currently using HOLOFIT?**

To date, although we're working with the likes of Anytime Fitness in the US, our focus has mostly been on smaller chains and independents where there's more flexibility to test new concepts. We're generally seeing clubs invest in between two and eight headsets, which are then used to monetise the gym floor, either by selling premium membership add-ons or pay as you go usage.

But we are now seeing interest grow among the bigger operators. One interesting concept is currently being trialled at Pure Gym and Basefit in the UK, in collaboration with Matrix Fitness, and at Corefit in Italy. Each operator has selected a club where they've created a VR Innovation Zone featuring five or six ellipticals, each with their own VR headset. These zones are running 15-minute 'HOLOFIT Track' interval training programmes, with the option to either timetable them so everyone starts together – members can then compete against each other, either in-club or inter-club – or, during off-peak times, make the programme available for people to drop in whenever a station becomes free.

It's a great way of creating an engaging experience for members and monetising the gym floor, while at the same time limiting the workout to 15 minutes – our research shows that, even on tough pieces of equipment like Concept2 rowing machines, those using HOLOFIT are happy to keep going for 2.3 times longer than without it!

Finally, what we're also seeing emerge – especially in markets like Japan, but also in Europe – are VR-only gyms. It's still a niche area, but it's very interesting.

What's your model for the home fitness space?

We sell HOLOFIT GO for home use, but here our mission is different: it's about making it easier and more fun to exercise at home.

Sitting on an exercise bike in your spare room can be uninspiring; HOLOFIT allows you to escape this boring environment, transporting you to a parallel, virtual universe. It adds a whole new dimension to radically transform the at-home fitness experience.

**GYMS HAVE A CHOICE:
MEET CUSTOMER DEMAND
YOURSELVES, OR ALLOW
'BRING YOUR OWN DEVICE'**

What are HOLOFIT's USPs?

First and foremost, it's the fact that we don't just do VR. We understand VR. That's an important distinction. Our tech team has been working in VR for around 15 years, going back to the days when a headset cost US\$60,000. They specialise in the way VR technology interacts with the human brain: what works, what doesn't, what motivates people. This is one of our USPs, and what ultimately sets those who succeed in VR apart from those who simply 'do' VR.

Another USP is that we've solved the issue of motion sickness while using VR, or at least dramatically reduced it, which all revolves around the quality of the content. We have a patent pending on this.

I also believe we have strong USPs if we look

beyond VR and into the broader fitness sector. For example, where most of the digital solutions on the market involve following a class on a big screen – but still in the environment of a group exercise studio – HOLOFIT changes the game by fully immersing people in a VR environment. It totally changes the experience.

What's in your development pipeline?

In about three months' time, we expect to launch a solution where you download and run HOLOFIT software through your mobile phone, clipping this into a head mount. It won't yet offer the same quality as a proper VR headset though, because we're waiting for the mobile phone technology – the graphics chips in phones – to catch up. That will take probably 12 to 18 months.

In fact, we're often waiting for other technologies to catch up with what we want to be able to do! We could already create a wireless version of HOLOFIT PRO for group exercise studios, for example, but at the moment it still costs too much to run graphics through the cloud. We really need 5G for this, so I suspect it will take two years even in the fastest-developing markets to deliver this cost-effectively. ►





▶ However, we don't always run as fast as we can when it comes to product development. There's a lot of talk about AI, for example, but we don't believe this really exists at the moment – what exists so far are machine learning algorithms – which is why we're happy to keep the virtual coaching in HOLOFIT quite simple for now. It's learning and growing every day from our user data, but true AI needs a lot of data. You can't base personalised recommendations on a handful of workouts, because such data will inevitably be skewed. We're happy to leave this element of what we do in its infancy until we're confident we have enough user data to understand real VR usage trends.

In the meantime, other areas we'll be develop-

**INDOOR CYCLING WILL HAVE
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ing include VR options for weight training as well as CV equipment, and AR (augmented reality) for outdoor use. We see little application for AR indoors, where there's far more benefit in escaping the normal – often less engaging – exercise environment altogether. But outdoors, where VR has little relevance, AR can



add excitement and interaction with the world around you. That said, we still expect VR to be a thousand times bigger than AR.

We're also exploring ways to better connect fitness with other aspects of people's lives, because it isn't – or shouldn't – be an isolated activity. Within the next 12 months, you'll be able to collect trophies while training on HOLOFIT, picking them up along the way; these will then have a monetary value in the real world, redeemable against things like workout apparel.

We may also open up to third party VR content providers in the future, provided they can create content that meets our exacting standards.

What do you see as the future of fitness – and cycling specifically?

Our research shows that 70 per cent of all HOLOFIT users become regulars. This is the future. We will all have at least one VR headset in our

homes. Gyms therefore have a choice: meet customer demand yourselves, or allow BYOD – bring your own device.

And indoor cycling specifically? I'm excited by the way VR could democratise this activity. I envisage small group training classes on the gym floor, opening group cycling up to anyone too intimidated to join a class full of uber-fit regulars. I envisage people using VR on their own too, not only on Spin bikes but also on more accessible models such as recumbents.

Over-arching all of this, indoor cycling will have to become a lot more immersive than it is today, and delivered in a far more flexible way. That means moving away from a fixed format – a reliance on cycling studios, external screens and live instructors – towards technology that allows for a differentiated, engaging, motivational, fun, personalised experience... because this is the experience consumers now expect. ●

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