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From the battlefield to the gym, **Lorne Castle** looks at how **MuayThai** is being hailed for its health and fitness benefits.



# MUAYTHAI FOR FITNESS



➔ Thai fighters usually have a lean physique from the constant movement

**M**uayThai is fast becoming one of the trendiest and most sought after forms of martial art and combat fitness training in the world today. Evolving from the battlefields of Thailand, this lethal yet athletic martial art is today being recognised for its many health and fitness benefits, and is being used by everyone from professional athletes in other sports who are benefitting from cross training, right down to your everyday gym goer who is looking for the most effective way to burn calories and condition their body.

Already recognised worldwide as the King of the Ring, MuayThai is renowned for its devastating power and lethal strikes using

the sharpest and strongest points of the body. Repetitive kick drills, hours of cardio and rounds on the pads have, for years, been the staple of conditioning for the native Thai fighters - and is what has toned their famous lean, yet conditioned physique - it literally is in their blood and is their life. Combine this with a hot climate and healthy diet of fresh, lean meat with good carbohydrates and you can understand how this way of life has some advantageous health and fitness benefits. The MuayThai warrior has amazing speed of moves, flexibility and a strength that has to be felt to be believed - and often has a very lean and athletic body shape chiselled from an unusually high calorie burn rate which is the product of MuayThai training. Combine this with a great 'inner peace' that is found following

a session where you literally punch away every stress and strain that you may carry and you realise why the Thai People are known for their smile - life outside the ring is for happiness, health and enjoyment.

Come halfway around the world to the UK though, with a different climate, different food and a lifestyle where you have far less hours in the day to train and it is important to analyse what you want to achieve from training and prioritise your valuable training time to maximise the results in your target area. However, it is clear that training in MuayThai is good for your body - and, as with anything, the more time you have to do it, the better the results, both in performance and appearance.

With famous faces also donning the gloves and doing rounds on the pads, hitting the bag and jumping the rope, it shows a good MuayThai training session can help maintain that superstar body and also relieve any stress giving the ultimate feel good satisfaction from a workout. *Fast and Furious* star **Paul Walker** cuts up with MuayThai for his movie roles along with American gladiator **Gina Carano** who actually built her ass kicking frame from MuayThai - so it is clear that anyone wanting to gain fitness benefits should look at MuayThai.

## WHY & HOW?

Well, firstly, it would be important to define the different types of classes that might be encountered here in the Western world... MuayThai classes fall to two different types;



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**Traditional MuayThai** where the art and style is learnt - in these classes the training is more similar to a traditional martial arts class where the training is based around preparing for real life fights - you learn the true martial art.

Or **MuayThai combat** or **sport class** where the ethos is based around the training one would do for a ring fight. For pure fitness benefits people should look for a Thai Combat or sport class where an average 155lb male will burn upward of 600 calories per hour whilst doing different types of work and keeping it exciting and interesting, rather than an hour on a static machine. For fitness and health benefits, competition training based classes are the one to look for.

#### WHY?

It's fun - plain and simple - everyone loves hitting something. As a personal trainer, even back in the mid '90s, countless members of the first ever *Fitness First* in Bournemouth



➔ MuayThai is an enjoyable way to keep fit

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would always want me to hold pads for a few rounds as part of their workout, rather than spend time in the regular gym - and, if the mind is interested, you will engage longer and better, leading to better results.

MuayThai fight training is a great combination of cardio, strength and conditioning and calisthenics. MuayThai has had all the benefits of many new fitness fads since its origin, but the real secret is in its technique...

MuayThai is a power martial art in that it requires the hip to be thrown in every technique, which in turn involves more muscle groups becoming involved in each move (this is more recently known as the

theory of **Kinetic Linking**). For instance, even a straight punch has its power and force begin from the foot thrusting the leg and hip forward then the core engaging and twisting the shoulder which, in turn, throws and directs the fist - so you can see, by involving the hip, the whole body works together to deliver a more forceful result and, as such, uses far more muscle groups.

A typical session\* will have cardio benefits from a correct warm up, combined with strength and conditioning benefits gained from the conditioning phase (often involving many body weight exercises such as a variety of press-ups, sit ups, pull ups etc...). However, it is the



Denise working at a mid rep range weight to increase arm strength for the clinch - MuayThai training really conditions you



## MUAYTHAI FOR FITNESS

actual pad work or bag work that lights the fuse on burning calories, with these rounds being a great mix of cardio and strength - with the heart rate kept high and the muscles going into overdrive. The benefits can be categorised (in no particular order):

### 01. A Better Body shape: A

MuayThai training session will literally send your metabolism into overdrive and give it a massive boost which will result in burning off unwanted stores of body fat whilst increasing muscle density from its conditioning parts, giving a leaner figure.

### 02. Flexibility increases:

Flexibility when you are young is often taken for granted, but you only realise its true value with age. The beauty of MuayThai is that every time you flow a move with correct technique you are allowing many muscle groups to stretch. Kick after kick after kick, each round can have dynamic stretching benefits simply by involving a range of different height and style kicks. Couple this with a good cool down static stretch and your muscles will truly benefit from the workout.



Padwork can give you a huge calorie burn in only 3 minutes and leave your metabolism sky high for some time after

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### \*MUAYTHAI TRAINING SESSION

\*When training in MuayThai it is important to understand the percentage of time to areas of training ratio - i.e. there is no point in doing a 50 minute run as a warm up if it leaves you with only 10 minutes of Thai Boxing. Instead, any training session should have maybe 20% of time initially as warm up. With the beauty of MuayThai and how harsh the pad work/bag work is - this warm up is exactly that - a warm up, so it can be enjoyed, not blown out. Skipping or running both warm up the correct muscle groups that will be used and help strengthen the joints. Skipping with a heavy rope also adds great toning benefits to the upper arms, which helps create a good shoulder cut look. A warm up is important as well, to raise the heart rate at the correct pace for safety and maximum benefits from your training session.

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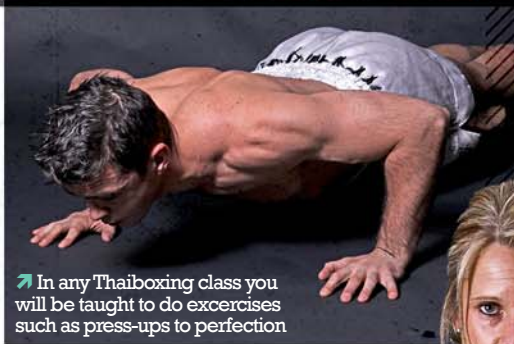


**MUAYTHAI**  
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➤ The entire physique of a Thaiboxing champion is lean from constant movement.

■ **03. Stronger heart rate:** as with any intense exercise over time, your heart will become more efficient to be able to meet the demands that are required when training, which will result in a lower resting heart rate which is a measure of good health. As you get better, the intensity can increase, along with your ability and level of fitness. An example here: WBC MuayThai World Champion **Denise Castle** has a RHR (Resting Heart Rate) of only 42 BPM (Beats Per Minute) - in a nut shell, this means that the heart has an increased stroke volume to enable each beat to deliver more oxygen to the muscles when they need it due to training, therefore, when not training, the heart does not need to beat as many times to satisfy the bodily needs.

■ **04. Hand, eye, foot co-ordination and balance:** Being in harmony with your body enables your body to move fast, yet remain balanced under pressure. As MuayThai involves the 'eight limbs' it is a great way to train your mind to evade one body part whilst launching an attack with another. Being under pressure trains your body to perform and encourages quick thinking.



➤ In any Thaiboxing class you will be taught to do exercises such as press-ups to perfection

■ **05. Confidence:** The simple gain in self-confidence that is benefitted from not only believing in your abilities, but from the training environment and comradeship with co-members is a great benefit when it comes to good feeling and inner peace.

So, it is clear how training in MuayThai will be the key to re-shaping yourself to the body of your dreams whilst building a strong, confident and happy mindset - but the benefits do not stop there. MuayThai training can be tailored for more specific goals once you scratch the surface and become proficient in the basics, hence many professional

athletes use a MuayThai session as a cross training session to gain performance increases. Over the coming months I will feature on specific areas and training methods and how they give benefit. ■

**LORNE CASTLE**



**NEXT MONTH** How MuayThai Training helped one runner become a regular distance champion - this will follow and detail the introduction to MuayThai training methods that helped **Denise Castle** (Now WBC World Champion) knock minutes off her 10km and half marathon times to become county champion when she was first introduced to MuayThai AND how UK NFL player, **Shaun Smith**, found the pad work benefits of MuayThai.

➤ Denise working with Dumbbells on a Lateral Raise - great for building strength in the clinch