

# GRAN-TASTIC!

How Pilates is helping this 70-year-old gran of six to live life to the full

By Carol Westmorland



**FIRMLY** believe that age is just a number. My father is 63 and he covers more miles in a year on his bike than an average motorist – 12,000 to be precise.

He cycles at a competitive level of someone half his age. My mother, who has just turned 60, is a Pilate devotee. She takes part in three classes a week and her daily walk around the lanes involves lots of arm swinging.

So you can understand why I am unwilling to subscribe to the limits of ageing. I can barely keep up with them both. My sister Gilly is a staff nurse who works on Oncology and she shares my belief that those fortunate enough to reach milestones should be grateful, and to that end, invest in their health. This leads me on to our subject – my special star.

Twelve years ago I met Carole Walker when she was approaching such a milestone. This vivacious and amazing woman didn't quite match up to the number. The same amazing woman, or Superwoman to those who know her has now just passed her next milestone and she is looking fantastic.

She has, albeit naturally blessed, an attitude of mind and determined effort that has got her to where she is today.

Her son Keith says: "Our mum has always been the epitome of a healthy lifestyle. From the running of 'keep fit' classes and teaching swimming as part of her physiotherapy job at HK Campbell



Superfit: Seventy-year-old Carole Walker with Pilates teacher Carol Westmorland LOUISE PORTER

School through to her current daily swims and Pilates classes.

"At 70, she is Grandy to six grandchildren ranging from three to 19 who are exhausted just trying to keep up with her".

Regular exercise has always been a big part of Carole's life and, in return, it has allowed her to live life to the full.

At no time are the benefits of caring for the body more apparent than in later life. Eastern exercise systems, such as yoga and t'ai chi are practised by older people.

They prolong mobility and flexibility into old age and claim to maximise longevity. The West, by contrast, largely ignores exercise for older people, who are assumed incapable of physical improvement.

Pilates-based exercises are the exception. Realising you had back pain only when it has gone away is not uncommon. Becoming aware of our bodies and how they function allows us to find hidden quirks and peculiarities. Poor circulation is boosted, the

movements gently massage away stress and because it is non-impact and calming, Pilates is the ideal exercise system for the second half of life.

Transforming the image of ageing, there is now a generation of people accustomed to a high level of physical activity.

For those who gave up exercise decades ago there are obstacles to overcome. Many need to be convinced that there is value to starting again. They worry about imposing physical stresses on an

unfit and tired body and are concerned about the real value of making all that effort.

I look at it another way. Not making that effort will be short sighted in the long term. Neglecting to use your muscles is the biggest obstacle to mobility that older people face.

Small changes make a huge difference. Through work on posture, core stability is restored and so begins the re-establishment of the body's natural range of movement.

Being asked to perform basic movements – movements the body is designed to do – can initially feel quite challenging and not just physically. More often it is the mind telling the body what to do that surprises you.

Suddenly being 'in tune' with your body is fantastically empowering. What is there not to achieve?

The Pilates movement works from top to toe; ignoring nothing. Everyone has to start somewhere at any age. I believe that we are all like sponges. Some of us absorb information quickly while for others it takes a little longer until suddenly, it will click.

If results happened overnight then where would our goals be? A challenge is good for you. It puts you in charge and you have nothing to lose.

"And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count, it's the life in your years." These wise words were spoken by Abraham Lincoln and they're still important, today.

■ Carol Westmorland, who is also a national cycling champion, holds pilates classes throughout the week. Further information from [www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk](http://www.pilates-cumbria.co.uk)

## Why I dread the hunt for a comfortable pair of boots

THERE'S nothing I hate more than buying new walking boots . . . apart from going to the dentist . . . oh, and donating blood . . . and *EastEnders* . . .

Okay, so there are a few things I hate more, but buying boots can be a pain.

Every time I wear down an old pair, I'm faced with the prospect of trudging around Keswick for two or three hours, trying on dozens of boots, attempting to absorb all the technical information the shop assistants throw at me and slowly being ground down by the monotony of tying and untying all those laces.

Then I go back to the first shop I visited and buy the same boots

Guidebook writer VIVIENNE CROW shares her love of the great outdoors



that I've been wearing for more than 20 years.

I'm not kidding you! I go through this same ritual every four or five years and, every four or five years, I buy exactly the same model of Scarpa boots that I first bought in 1986.

What can I say in my defence? They're comfortable!

Well, that is, they used to be comfortable.

I bought my last pair of

Scarpas 18 months ago, and they recently started aggravating my Achilles tendon. The pain was so bad, in fact, that I decided I would run the gauntlet of Keswick's outdoor gear shops before my time was due.

This time my friend Deborah – who happens to be a chiropodist – came along.

"Ah! Your tibi-doo-dah post-e-wotsit muscle's not working properly and your proximal phaling-amejig looks unusually long."

I'm pretty sure that's what I heard her say as she looked disdainfully down at my bare feet in the first shop. My naked toes curled under in embarrassment.

When trying on boots, she explained to me, it's worth taking the insole out. Standing upright, you should place your foot on it, ensuring your heel is as far back on the insole as it will go. There should be about a finger's width of space between your toes and the end of the insole.

Once you've done the laces up, your heel should not move and your big toe should not be pressing against the uppers. Good outdoor retailers will have an incline board so you can find out what the boots feel like when you're walking downhill – your feet should not slip forward.

The key to buying boots is to know exactly what you are going

to need them for. The rougher the terrain, the firmer the arch and ankle support you will need.

Stiffer, leather boots take some time to break in, but many shops will allow you to take the boots home, wear them around the house and then return them if you decide they're unsuitable.

So, six shops and 14 pairs of boots later, I came away with a pair of relatively lightweight leather boots for £120.

Now all I need to do is find a new home for a pair of Scarpas, low mileage, one lady owner . . . Any takers?

■ Vivienne Crow is a freelance writer specialising in outdoor pursuits.