

## HEALTH AND BEAUTY

It all looked terrifying, but I was in total agreement with her statement that the more you exercise, the better and easier it is.

After the usual medical checks, work began in earnest. I was asked to stand at ease, checked over and Pippa immediately picked up a list to the left – and we weren't even at sea.

She started me off with a leg exercise on a flat mat thingy, demonstrating how it should be done, breathing out, then in, lying face down and lengthening the spine, feeling the breath expanding across the shoulders. There was nothing tense-making, it was all very comfortable, but



Pippa demonstrates a cardio-vascular workout involving both arms and legs

then Pippa does come from a disciplined dance background where every movement must look effortless.

So, my turn . . . and lift, utilising pelvic floor, navel to spine, breathe, one, two, three, five hundred. It's all about relaxing, aligning, breathing and centering with a flow, and damn me, I could do it.

Which meant that we switched to a more advanced exercise, where I was lifting my pelvis, but keeping my back straight in a one, two, three, roll onto the shoulders. "Oh," said Pippa encouragingly, "you're a natural." Now that is just what a complete beginner needs to hear to get them on to the next stage. Pippa demonstrated and I watched open-mouthed as she looped her feet, situated at the bottom (not unnaturally) of her very long legs into a loop attached to an elastic twingy thing and then stretched skyward. Oh, right then.

Fortunately I wasn't expected to follow her example, and was given a couple of exercises on the same machine that was easily within my capabilities – stretching the arms, pulling the ham strings, a real cardio-vascular workout. These amazing machines can be altered to fit in with the expertise of the user and it's a world away from the village hall mentality of mats and hairy armpits, yet not a hugely expensive exercise, if you'll forgive the pun.



Feeling the stretch but not the burn, Nicola tries to keep up

"I can have a maximum of six at a time," Pippa says. "For the first few sessions it's best to come on an individual basis or with a couple of friends, which reduces the cost, and then join in a full class once you know what pilates is all about."

I know I'll never look as extended as Pippa, but her class gave me hope about increasing my flexibility and therefore my agility. I'm hooked. □

- Pippa Wylde's pilates studio can be found in Herriard (turning opposite the church). It is open Monday to Friday 7.45am–6.30pm and Saturday 9.30am–1pm. For further information, call 01256 381122 or log on to [www.pippawylde.com](http://www.pippawylde.com)

The American-made machines by Balance are laid out in Pippa's new studio, the largest in Hampshire

