

The Turbo Rehabilizer Mark IV

About a year ago I decided that it would be a good idea to get muscles.

I jog frequently and generally keep in good shape, but one day on the way home I took a look in neighborhood gym with all those contrivances, barbells and torsion machines. Curious, I walked over to the coffee machine and chatted with all these guys who looked like they came out of the Mr. America contest. One short guy said he looked just like me a year ago and then, I swear, he did an impromptu Arnold Schwarzenegger pose. Arm bent at the elbow, legs apart, his pecs started twitching, biceps bulging, veins quivering in his neck. Gotta get some of those, I thought, thoroughly impressed.

So I joined and began using every machine in the gym four times a week. Each time I increased the weights until I could just barely make the gadgets move the required distance. I could almost feel my abs and pecs bursting through my skin.

After several weeks my shoulders began to hurt. I figured that this was a sure sign that the workouts were producing muscle. I worked out harder. My wife, who often accompanied me to the gym, seemed to be impressed with my efforts. She said she noticed the tendons in my neck straining as the weights increased. She pointed out that my various guttural sounds were getting more frequent and much louder. She said that people were beginning to stare at me. I interpreted this to be admiration.

One morning I got out of bed and couldn't put my pants on. Putting on your pants is a pretty important thing for a man to be able to do under most circumstances, but instead of bagging the workout that day, with help from my wife I managed to get my pants and sneakers on and sucked it up. I worked out even harder, my grunts building to a crescendo as I pushed, pulled, prodded and stretched the machines. I noticed that my wife went over to the far corner of the gym to work out.

The next morning, standing unclothed in the bathroom, Trying to make various muscle poses in the mirror, I could see that my wife, peeking around the corner, was having a hard time not rolling with laughter. Every molecule of my upper body ached agonizingly. Even brushing my teeth was painful. I went to a doctor.

He spent around thirty seconds examining my shoulders as I whimpered my sad story. “It’s repetitions, not pounds, that make muscles,” he intoned pompously. “Checkout Melvin’s rehab center. He will fix you up, alright.” I thought I detected a smile as he handed me a prescription.

Melvin’s Fixit BodyShop is contained in a small, unassuming house in San Juan Cosalá. Melvin had machines too. I suspect they were originally created during the fifteenth century Inquisition by Jesuits.

I met Melvin. He was affable, had a firm handshake, spoke English well, and had an unswerving belief that pain is a good thing. Then he began to rotate my left arm as if he were cranking up a diesel outboard motor. My resulting shriek apparently did the job to convince him that a milder form of therapy might be indicated for the time being.

He gave me a tour. There were pulleys and wands and balls of every description. There were a number of hand weights of various colors and sizes. There was a cage that looked like it belonged in a playground. Finally he showed me the accursed “Cybex machine.” It looked suspiciously like it could jump start a dead truck.

Picture a swiveling handle attached to a mechanical “arm” which is, in turn, adjustably affixed to the actual Cybex variable resistance device. A couch that can be raised, lowered, flat or upright is part of the ensemble. Padded attachments to the couch are used as “stops” to vary the range of motion the human arm is forced to maneuver.

The victim is required to grab the handle and attempt to sweep upward and outward in a straight arc from navel to above and beyond the shoulder at an angle that can be manually set. All of the angles, the length of the mechanical extension and positioning of the couch of many positions had to be done by eyeballing it, he explained. “That’s why experts are needed,” he confided as he pointed to a diploma on the wall.

So with warm compresses under my upper arm, anticipating an hour or so on this contrivance of death probably designed by Count Alessandro Guiseppe Antonio Anastasio Volta’s 18th century clandestine experiments with life and death using the legs of dead frogs and a battery, alternatively grunting with exertion on the up sweep of the Cybex arm and groaning with pain of the down sweep, I began to think.

Why should I pay Melvin for all this attention? I began to scheme how I might not only fix my own shoulder and make some money instead of dumping a small fortune down the deltoid fixit hole. Suddenly I remembered how I get my blood pressure measured on devices in every supermarket and drug store in America. You sit down, put your arm in a cuff, push a button and presto....131 over 78. Eureka! I had a great idea.

So after my rehab session, waving goodbye to Melvin, hopefully forever, I rushed home and started drawing. A completely automatic, coin operated Cybex-like machine would make me a fortune. The brilliance of my concept was this: instead of offering programmed resistance with the patient struggling against it, my machine would do all the work for him. "Rehab without sweat" my TV ads would trumpet. But I needed to make a prototype before I went to the patent office in Mexico City.

First I went to Home Depot in Guadalajara, bought several rolls of duct tape, a new hacksaw blade, screws, around 100 feet of PVC tubing, a 4' by 8' piece of quarter inch plywood, several pulleys, some flexible rubber hose, assorted grommets, one hectare of bailing wire, a soldering gun, 15 rolls of number 22 solder and a supply of sheet metal.

Then, I managed to locate some gears from a 1959 De Soto sedan differential assembly abandoned in the hills of Lake Chapala. I also found an old reclining passenger seat of a 1955 Nash Rambler that all teenage boys in my youth prayed for because of nefarious plans regarding the opposite sex. I managed to rip a couple of upper ball joints from the rear wheels of the car and dragged the transmission to my van. A junked coke machine that had a coin operating mechanism would serve the purposes of my creation nicely.

For days my wife brought me food as I worked non stop to finish the prototype, adapting an old IBM computer as the brain of my creation. She no longer asked me questions. She left the tray on the floor and hurriedly left the room. Finally, one evening, I plugged it in. The gears engaged, the duct tape looked secure, the LED display showed the right numbers. It was a little noisy, but after all it was only intended to be a "proof of concept" for the patent rights. I felt great. I yelled, "It's Alive! It's Alive!" and bounded around the house with a pillow on my back under my tee shirt. It was beautiful. My wife barricaded herself behind the pantry door, peeking out occasionally to see if I had gone.

Now I needed to try it out for a test flight. I plugged the device into the wall socket and lay down on the Nash Rambler recliner seat while it warmed up.

Next, I put my arm in the cuff, punched a few instructions on the keyboard, put 500 pesos in the coin slot, grabbed the handle attached to the differential pulley and pushed the start button.

It worked perfectly. The artificial arm began to make a nice, clean arc from my navel to a spot just above and to the left of my shoulder at precisely 60 degrees, my real arm rotating at just the right spot. My shoulder hurt like hell, but I remembered that *Melvin's Physical Fixit BodyShop* Cybex machine also took some warming up until I got past the pain. It was dazzling. I didn't have to exert a single erg of energy. My rehab machine was doing all the work for me. It was fully automatic. No "eyeballing" needed here.

I was congratulating myself and already mentally planning my trip to the patent office. In my mind's eye there were thousands, millions of finely crafted machines, gleaming aluminum levers and gears and easy to read instructions on a color, flat panel LCD, all providing a simple, yet useful service for people of all nationalities, color and creeds with shoulder malfunctions. I would call it the "Turbo Rehabilizer Mark IV." I was already designing the logo in my head. Goodbye Melvin. Hello painless rehab business.

Then I sensed that my arm seemed to be going a bit faster. I heard a grinding noise that seemed to be coming from the Hydromatic transmission. The Rambler seat suddenly sat bolt upright from the prone position. I glanced at the differential gears attached to the upper ball joint that made the mechanical arm twist in the appropriate direction. The duct tape was coming loose. The user console began to flash on and off.

God help me, my machine was defecting. It had decided it didn't want to rehab a damn thing. My arm was fibrillating at about 45 rpm's at just the point that the synovial joint was supposed to rotate with a gentle counter clockwise motion. I glanced at the volt meter on the console just as an ear splitting scream of pain was beginning to extract itself from my lungs. The meter needle was climbing up towards the red line....when the lights went out. The grinding noise began to diminish, the console numbers went blank and I was sitting upright on a '55 Rambler recliner seat in total darkness, arm strapped to my electromechanical monster at precisely 60 degrees. "Thank God for short circuits," I murmured.

Lately I've been going three times a week to *Melvin's Physical Fixit BodyShop*. They have good magazines. I work out on the Cybex machine for about a half hour each visit. I always do as I'm told. Melvin says that we are making good progress. I'm beginning to like it here.