



# Muscle

## An Anticrash Course

Bodybuilding Lessons—Many Learned the Hard Way—From 30 Years of Experience

by Stuart McRobert • Photography by Michael Neveux

**M**y first *IRON MAN* article appeared in the June-July '81 issue. I started training in 1973, at 15, and I was a fanatical

bodybuilder for many years. I've written several books on bodybuilding, including the *Brawn* series, and I published and edited *Hardgainer* magazine for 15 years.

My purpose now? First, I want to itemize key lessons I wish I'd adopted from day one. These lessons are some of the so-called secrets I searched for during my early years

of bodybuilding that I wish someone had drummed into me. If I'd applied them from early on in my training, they would have spared me thousands of wasted workouts, saved me from dozens of injuries and yielded greater bodybuilding progress.

What the lessons can't do for me, though, they can do for others—perhaps including you. They apply to beginners, intermediates and even many advanced bodybuilders.

Bodybuilding is exciting and satisfying *only* if your training is working. If it's *not* working, bodybuilding is massively frustrating.

## 1) The Bodybuilding Secret

There aren't any great exercises, programs, sets-and-reps schemes or recovery plans that haven't been well promoted already. There are no bodybuilding secrets, but because good instruction has been mixed up with a lot of inferior instruction, most bodybuilders have become confused and distracted. Many falsely believe that the best advice must be complicated, expensive or not in the public domain.

What's missing in most bodybuilders' programs is consistent application of the most productive advice. While most bodybuilders are confused over how to train productively, even those who know how to train well usually don't apply what they know.

## 2) The Number-One Bodybuilding Priority

If you don't train safely, free of injuries, you'll never train consistently enough to realize your potential. Sure, that's obvious, but judging by how most bodybuilders train, they're not applying the obvious. Most bodybuilders carry injuries, and many of them periodically take enforced layoffs to recover from injuries. Compromised and wasted workouts slow progress or even proscribe it, and the ensuing frustration has caused many trainees to give up bodybuilding.

For best results you must train safely.

## 3) You Must Squat— or Must You?

I once believed that every serious bodybuilder must do barbell squats and that everyone who didn't squat was a wimp. Now I know better.

Done with correct technique, with proper attention to safety (including safety bars correctly positioned) and by trainees whose bodies are structurally suited to the movement, the barbell squat is highly pro- *(continued on page 122)*

**Correct technique for the barbell squat includes maintaining a slight hollow in your lower back throughout the full stroke of each rep. If you can't maintain that position, don't squat. Never round your back while squatting.**



Model: David Yeung \ Equipment: PowerTec power rack, 1-800-447-0008

**If you don't train safely, free of injuries, you'll never train consistently enough to realize your potential.**



Model: Berry Kabov

# Form—to Fill Out

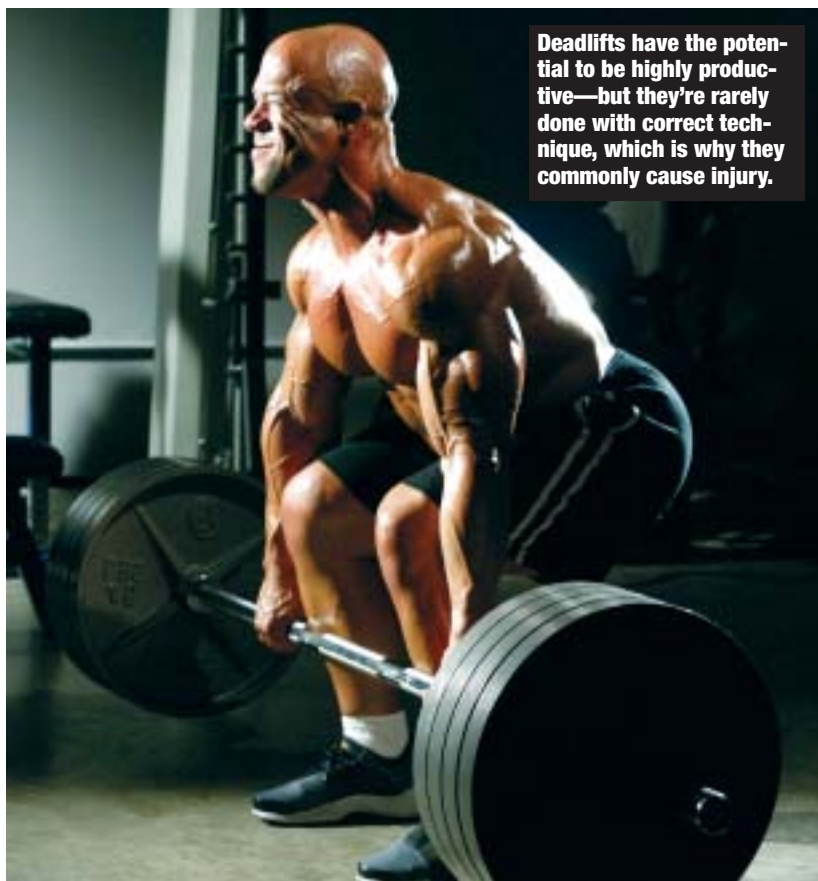
I used to be concerned only with getting the bar from point A to point B on a given exercise and adding weight to the bar as often as possible. How I moved the bar between the two points didn't matter. Technique liberties and use of momentum were the norm. No wonder I always had aches and pains and injuries to train around. No wonder I was never able to train consistently for a long period. And no wonder I never realized my bodybuilding potential. I was guilty of self-imposed limitations that compounded my biggest limitation—my genetic inheritance.

Effective bodybuilding is built on knowledge and dedication and the discipline to train safely. Do that, and you'll be consistent—motivation willing—and will reach your genetic potential without injury.

—S.M.

*(continued from page 118)* ductive. Unfortunately, it's rarely done with correct technique, is invariably done without proper attention to safety and is often done by trainees who are structurally unsuited to safe, productive squatting. So the truth is that most bodybuilders shouldn't do barbell squats.

Alternatives to the squat include parallel-grip deadlifts, leg presses and hip-belt squats. Those three exercises are dangerous, too, if you don't use correct technique, but they're usually less risky than the barbell squat.



Deadlifts have the potential to be highly productive—but they're rarely done with correct technique, which is why they commonly cause injury.

Model: Skip La Cour

Correct technique for the barbell squat includes maintaining a slight hollow in your lower back throughout the full stroke of each rep. If you can't maintain that position, don't squat. Never round your back while squatting.

includes maintaining a slight hollow in your lower back throughout the stroke of each rep. You also must keep the bar brushing against your legs. Never round your back while deadlifting.

## 4) You Must Deadlift—or Must You?

I once believed that every serious bodybuilder must deadlift in some form and that everyone who didn't deadlift was a wimp (does that sound familiar?). Now I know better.

Almost all trainees who use correct technique can find at least one form of the deadlift that will be right for them—the regular, bent-legged deadlift; the parallel-grip deadlift; the sumo deadlift; the stiff-legged deadlift; or the partial and Romanian deadlifts. Deadlifts have the potential to be highly productive—but they're rarely done with correct technique, which is why they commonly cause injury. Either deadlift with correct technique, or don't deadlift.

Correct technique for all deadlifts

## 5) The Ignored Maxim

“Use good form” is a maxim that's bandied around a lot. But take a look around any gym, and you'll see hardly anyone using good form on any exercises—and I'm not just referring to beginners. It's no wonder that so many bodybuilders get hurt.

Exercise technique is fundamental to bodybuilding, but ignorance of it is rampant. You should be concerned with proper equipment setup, grip, stance, body positioning and bar pathways. Few trainees practice correct technique because hardly any of them, including most gym instructors and personal trainers, knows what it is.

Exercise technique isn't secondary to program design. It comes first. Learn what correct technique is, apply it, and make no compromises—ever.



Model: Allen Sakiszadeh | Equipment: Ab-Bench, 1-800-447-0008

**Let rep smoothness be your guide. Learn how to do an exercise, and then perform it in a safe, controlled, results-producing manner.**

## 6) Rep Speed and Control

Lift the weight, don't throw it; and lower the weight, don't drop it. Most trainees perform their reps too fast—typically taking one second or less for each phase of a rep.

Let rep smoothness be your guide. If your reps are smooth—including during the turnaround between the positive and negative phases of each rep—you're using the control required for safety and applying stress to the target muscle. In practice, smooth reps typically take no less than two to three seconds for the positive phase and no less than another two to three seconds for the negative phase. For the positive phase of the final rep of a tough set, when you almost grind to a halt, you may need more than five seconds. Some exercises have a longer stroke, or range of motion, than others and thus need more seconds to show comparable control.

Of course, even smooth, controlled reps can be performed with incorrect exercise technique. In that case even your smooth, controlled reps can produce high-risk training.

Although rep speed and exercise technique are separate issues, they are integrated parts of safe training. Learn how to do an exercise, and then perform it in a safe, controlled, results-producing manner.

## 7) "No Pain, No Gain"—Insane!

Never do anything that hurts, don't train if you've hurt yourself, and never train through pain. Cumulative muscular discomfort and systemic fatigue from an exercise done with effort and correct technique is desirable, but pain isn't. Any sharp, stabbing or sudden shock is a sign you've injured yourself.

Countless trainees have given up bodybuilding because they've been hurt by foolish advice. Those who live the no-pain/no-gain maxim usually regret it, sooner or later.

## 8) Program Design

Have more rest days than weight-training days—weight-train three days per week at most. Many bodybuilders train too often. Those who successfully weight-train more than

three days a week are usually either genetically gifted or drug assisted.

Most hard-training beginners should train two times a week on the same full-body routine of about eight basic exercises and focus on mastering exercise technique while gradually building up exercise poundages. [Note: Vince Gironda disagrees, as you'll see in the article on page 98; however, his routine doesn't include squats, deadlifts and bench presses, which are much more taxing.]

Intermediates and even advanced bodybuilders can also prosper on twice-a-week training, but they should alternate two different full-body routines. If you need even more recovery time, you can divide the body and alternate the two routines over two nonconsecutive days per week. That would hit each bodypart once a week. For example, train quads, hamstrings, lower back, upper back and biceps at one workout, and abs, calves, chest, delts, triceps and neck at the other.

If training each bodypart once a week isn't optimal for muscle growth and training each bodypart two times a week is too much, try training each bodypart three times every two weeks. For example, using the split routine just outlined, alternate the two routines over three workouts per week, like this:

### Week 1

**Monday:** Quads, hamstrings, lower back, upper back and biceps

**Wednesday:** Abs, calves, chest, delts, triceps and neck

**Friday:** Quads, hamstrings, lower back, upper back and biceps

### Week 2

**Monday:** Abs, calves, chest, delts, triceps and neck

**Wednesday:** Quads, hamstrings, lower back, upper back and biceps

**Friday:** Abs, calves, chest, delts, triceps and neck

Even that program will overtrain you if you use too many exercises or sets—but that's a topic for the next article. Watch for more anticrash-course lessons to improve your bodybuilding in a future issue of *IRON MAN*. **IM**