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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/i-hated-spinning-then-i-spun-1487272204>

## GEAR & GADGETS

# I Hated Spinning. Then I Spun

Thanks to SoulCycle and other spinning franchises, riding a stationary bike indoors has become an out-of-this-world art form. Spinning skeptic Jason Gay took seven classes in seven days. Here's the tale of his conversion

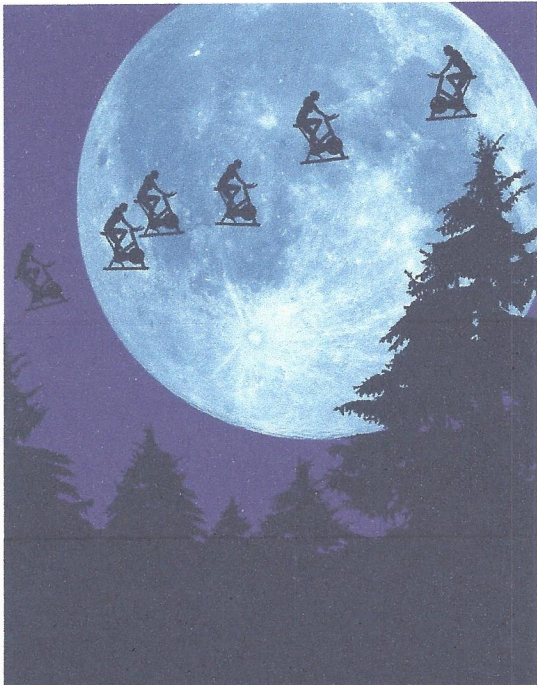


ILLUSTRATION: MATT CHASE

By **JASON GAY**

Updated Feb. 16, 2017 4:29 p.m. ET

**A CONFESSION ABOUT** spinning: I thought spinning was B.S.

Lately, this opinion made me something of a cultural outlier, I admit. (And also a bit of a jerk.) In New York City, where I live, and other hardscrabble towns throughout America, spinning has become not merely a fitness phenomenon but a bona fide social movement, with feverish adherents and spandexed high priests. Just as pilgrims once flocked to Cafe Wha to be transformed by Ginsberg or Dylan, they now pack dimly lit sweat caves to worship their favorite instructors, listen to Rihanna and ride and bounce around on stationary bikes to the precipice of regurgitation. Celebrities were early adopters, but my friends got sucked in, too. Many times I listened to otherwise reasonable people talk moonily about spin classes, as if they'd been abducted by aliens wearing clickety-clacking bike shoes.



I didn't get why spinning—a mundane staple of gym life for decades—had suddenly become such a hip, fashionable whoop. I loved riding bikes outdoors, but I found the handful of spinning classes I took years ago to be little more than 45 minutes of loud group perspiration. What was going on inside these cool new joints? How had they transformed spinning into such a manic marketplace? Why was it now adrenaline for the soul? And how on earth were they getting away with charging \$30 or more per ride?

I knew I needed to shut up, clip in, and try it out for myself. Which is exactly what I did. Earlier this month, I survived seven different spinning experiences in seven days. One (Zwift) occurred in my basement, with my own road bike attached to a Bluetooth-enabled trainer called the Wahoo Kickr; six were at New York spinning clubs (SoulCycle, Flywheel, Revolve, Peloton, Swerve and IMAXShift). I spun incognito, paid my own way, and only came close to throwing up once.

Here's what I learned.

**Spinning is fancy now.** Remember the olden days, when spin classes meant riding rusted-out broomsticks and mopping up your own sweat? Those days are over, pal. Today's spin rooms resemble sceney nightclubs. The bikes (usually standard stationary bikes, with a knob to adjust resistance) are typically arranged amphitheatre-style, surrounding the instructor.

The best bike, by far, was at Peloton—not surprising, since their main business is selling bikes for home use (you may have seen the Peloton TV ads with the handsome couple who look like they race each other to the mailbox for the Design Within Reach catalog). Most of the NYC spin classrooms, including Peloton's, were packed like subway cars, but one of them, IMAXShift, was a cavernous spinning megapolis where I rode in front of an enormous movie screen showing beaches, desert highways and Beyoncé, aka the three things I want to see right before I die.

**They treat you like a kingpin.** Walking into Flywheel, I was met by a tablet-bearing valet who took my name, then another valet escorted me to my reserved bike (already stocked with a towel and Flywheel-branded water!) and finely adjusted the seat to my princess-and-pea standards. When class was over, a latex-gloved crew rushed in to quickly sanitize the fleet before the next class rushed in. In the interim, the only thing I needed to do was...ride a bike like a maniac for 45 minutes.



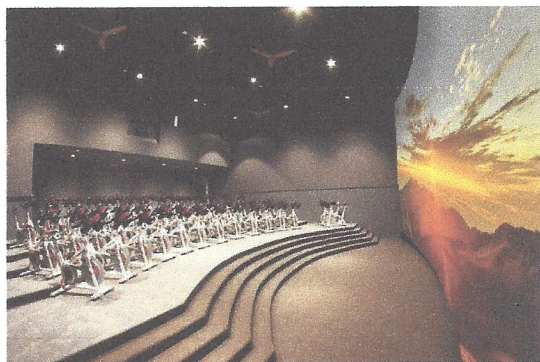
CULT CLUB A Peloton spinning class in Manhattan. PHOTO: ISAAC JAMES

**The instructors are practically celebrities**—and very good at their jobs. I'd had some bad spinning instructors in the past—yellers or stony, ambivalent types—but at these classes, there wasn't a bad one in the bunch. The teachers were enthusiastic, funny and accessible. The Cult of the Spinning Instructor is strong; the most beloved ones, like SoulCycle's Stacey Griffith, whom devotees

regard as a spiritual guru as much as a trainer, sell out their classes online in seconds. I got the last bike in a class with another popular SoulCycle instructor a friend recommended; it felt like scoring Springsteen tickets.

**Spin classes are Churches of Positivity.** I grew up with basketball coaches who thought the best way to teach me a jump shot was to mock mine. This is why I appreciated the thumbs-ups from spinning instructors and the incessant good vibes. We may have been miserable before walking in that door, but we are here to be happy! (Plus: fitness, sweat, endorphins, etc.) Do not fear. It's less of an ooey-goey positivity, more a "You're a badass—let's go work off those Saturday margaritas" version.

**Peer pressure is persuasive.** Technically it's easy to cheat in spinning; nobody's going to bust you for pretending to turn up the resistance on the bike when your instructor tells you to. But it's hard to not whip yourself into a frenzy seeing the flurry of spinning legs, and at some classes, like those at Flywheel, screens at the front of the studio show how hard you're working in relation to others. (The modest or easily humiliated can opt out.) At Swerve, we were grouped into teams so we could compete (good-naturedly). I wanted my team to win, and we did, which you probably saw on ESPN.



The IMAXShift studio, in Brooklyn, where riders pedal in front of a giant movie screen. PHOTO: IMAXSHIFT

**Spinning has embraced data (sort of).** In the past I found spinning to be a strangely low-fi experience. In contrast to elliptical machines or

StairMasters on the gym floor, spin-class bikes were basically data-free contraptions with few accouterments beyond water-bottle cages. That's changed. While not every current spinning class uses numbers—SoulCycle remains decidedly numbers-free—many have installed meters on the bikes that deliver info like time, RPM (revolutions per minute), speed and some version of power.

None of it, however, compares to Zwift, the home cycling program I downloaded to my iPhone. Zwift doesn't have instructors but instead puts you on a virtual course with other riders, moving you along using a power metric called "watts per kilogram." Zwift also tracks functional threshold power (FTP), or the power you can sustain over a period of time. Data like this are not part of the typical spinning experience, but they're an incredibly effective way to track your progress. (Or lack thereof.)

**Spinning is not cycling.** As a snotty cyclist, I needed to chill on this point. I had to accept that we weren't just turning pedals—we were bouncing off the seat and moving our upper bodies up and down the handlebars and lifting itty-bitty weights and doing a lot of aerobic-type things that have no place in road cycling, where a quiet upper body is important. I did appreciate that every class I took emphasized high RPM as opposed to low-RPM grinding. It's not hard to see how these spin classes could upgrade to Bluetooth-enabled bikes, which could be manipulated by the instructor, adding a new dynamic. Imagine that, instead of your having to turn a knob two rotations to simulate climbing a hill, the pedaling simply got harder on its own. No escape. No excuses. Sounds terrible and glorious.

**There is a lot of Rihanna in spinning.** A lot. I think Rihanna should get a royalty from all the spinning classes in the U.S. This was fine with me. I know there's an abundance of music choices, but I do not want to go to a spinning class and listen to the Allman Brothers. Sorry, Allman Brothers.

**The time I almost threw up** was at IMAXShift, when the screen showed us flying off a canyon cliff like Thelma & Louise, and I briefly felt a rumble of nausea. That said, I really loved IMAXShift. It was the most transporting of all the classes I took, even if it

sometimes made me want to stop and watch a movie about Mount Everest or singing whales.

**Yes, the prices are nutty**, about \$30 per class and up. (Revolve was the cheapest, at \$260 for 10.) I spent a lot of time calculating: Two \$30 classes per week for a year would run you over \$3,000, with which you could buy a really, really sweet bike. It helped to break the price into line items: I thought of it as \$10 for the class, \$10 for the positivity and \$10 to do it in a place that doesn't look like it will give you the plague.

**On the other FOOT...** price doesn't seem to be an issue for the devoted clientele. I heard it countless times: spinning makes you fit, it makes you happy, it's a lot cheaper than therapy, and nobody asks you about your parents.

**What I'm trying to say is:** I was wrong about spinning. I get why it's popular, and I'm not going to dump on it again.

**I lost 87 pounds. OK: I lost 4 pounds.**

**Seven rides in seven days may have been a bit much. I'm tired.**

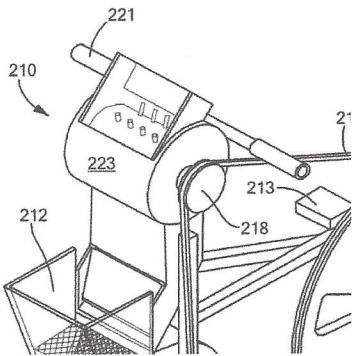
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**Trial Cycles**



3 real patents that promise to make stationary biking more purposeful, if not more thrilling

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