

THIS MONTH, WE TRY...

# ROLLERSKI

Hang up your inline skates and strap on a pair of rollerskis for the ultimate all-over workout, that's also perfect pre-ski-season training. **Alix Miller** gets in some glide time

Cross-country skiing is not something you often see in London. Nor has the Scandinavians' favourite winter pastime grabbed us Brits on our winter holidays – we tend to prefer the more adrenaline-packed, and downright lazy, downhill ski option.

Personally, I've always wanted to give the annual Engadin Swiss cross-country ski marathon a go but have never got round to it. Okay, I'm also a tinsy bit scared that if I did try it I'd keel over from exhaustion after a couple of miles and make a me-shaped hole in the snow. You see, cross-country skiing is about the best all-over workout you can get. It works lower and upper body and your core intensely, but has the benefit of being low-impact too.

Olympic rowers Matthew Pinsent and James Cracknell use rollerski, the dry-land version, for cross-training purposes, and ex-footballer Ian Wright is a new convert. So, when I was offered the opportunity of a private rollerski lesson I couldn't refuse the chance to get my cross-country ski legs... on wheels.

To do this unusual sport, you wear special rollerskis, which have a passing resemblance to inline skates but feel utterly different, and carry a set of poles. I met my instructor Iain Ballentine in London's Battersea Park. Iain is a seasoned rollerskier having started at the tender age of 13. He now teaches it to groups and individuals in London and Windsor, and is on a mission to bring it to a wider, mainstream audience. The group lessons are growing popular, but he also recruits rollervirgins while out and about.

'The other day I was rollerskiing here, and a man came up to me and asked what I was doing,' says Ballentine. 'I told him, and invited him to have a go there and then. He took to it right away and loved it.'

I, however, did not take to it right away. I expected to, being a reasonable skier and inline skater, but found the act of moving each foot alternately 45° out to the side an unstable and very shaky business. It sounded easy, and the idea is to keep your feet close to the ground and simply glide, but the reality saw me shuffling along, half gliding, half shuddering



**ROLLERGIRL:** Alix discovers rollerskiing's harder than it looks as she wobbles – then glides – through Battersea Park with help from instructor Iain Ballentine

and nearly coming a cropper when the occasional twig got caught in my wheels. Within five minutes the soles of my feet were aching badly. 'It's very common,' reassured Ballentine. 'It's because you're working muscles that don't normally get used.' This was quickly remedied with some stretches.

Keeping the rollerskis flat was also a challenge. My knees and, therefore, rollerskis seemed to roll inwards or outwards. Luckily at this early stage, we used the poles merely for balance so I could concentrate on staying upright. Balance, I quickly realised, is something you need in spades.

Next, Ballentine showed me some exercises. One, the 'scooter', involved taking one rollerski off and pushing along with the other, to improve balance. Another, the 'slalom', around cones or poles, forces you to turn by making small movements to the side with your toes.

By this time, everything was aching, so we did some double poling as a breather. This was more like it. It's like being on alpine skis when you get to a flat bit and pole yourself forward, keeping your feet parallel. Ballentine explained how to use my abdominals to push, and it felt like doing sit-ups standing up.

After an hour, I was really getting the hang of it. I'll definitely be back. Next stop, the Engadin Marathon.



'Rollerskiing works your upper and lower body'



## WHAT YOU NEED

A helmet, knee pads, gloves, rollerskis and poles. You can hire all these (for free on your first lesson) from Rollerski UK ([www.rollerski.co.uk](http://www.rollerski.co.uk)), for £10 for up to two hours.

## HOW TO GET STARTED

Group and one-to-one Rollerski lessons are available in London parks and Windsor. A one-to-one hour-long lesson teaches you the basics. Lessons cost £30 per hour for individuals, £40 per hour for groups of two to three and £50 per hour for groups of four to five. One-day courses are being held this autumn at Dorney Rowing Lake near Windsor. The course, which includes a day's tuition, video analysis, all equipment hire and lunch, costs £45. To find out more, visit [www.rollerski.co.uk](http://www.rollerski.co.uk).