

The Pilates Ladder Barrel: Effective and Easy-to-Use

by *Siri Dharma Galliano*



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Since 1987, Siri Dharma Galliano has been one of the leading Pilates instructors in Southern California. A protégé of Romana Kryzanowska, Ms. Galliano has traveled the world working with celebrity clients like Uma Thurman and Carrie-Anne Moss to get them into peak fitness for roles in movies such as; *Batman*, *The Matrix 2&3*, and *Kill Bill 1&2*. Ms. Galliano is the founder of the Live Arts Pilates Studio and also conducts continuing education courses in Classical Pilates at national and international seminars as well as other Pilates studios.

The Ladder Barrel is a great piece of Pilates equipment as it takes up about half the footprint of a Reformer or Cadillac. It stores easily against the wall; ready to be pulled out whenever needed. The Ladder Barrel is one of the simplest of Pilates apparatus, with no springs, straps, chains, hooks or moving parts. It is a station where people in studios, clubs or home gyms can immediately start their leg and back stretches.

The Ladder Barrel is versatile, effective and very easy to use. For example, little instruction is needed to begin various movements; including the *five basic Pilates stretches* for the hamstrings, quads, adductors, Achilles tendons and the psoas muscle (the hip muscle that embraces the side of the lumbar spine). These exercises are particularly great for the men in your classes.

Great for the men in your class...

Women, for the most part, do Pilates to firm their bodies. Men do Pilates to loosen them, as their hips are usually stiffer and their muscles are usually tighter. Back in the '20's and '30's many dancers called these basic stretches on the barrel the "ballet stretches". That was somewhat of a misconception as the exercises were also given to polo players and boxers. Today, these movements have become a crucial pre-workout regimen for golfers, runners, and many other athletes, and, again, are perfect for helping men with tight muscles get loose.

Work hard-to-firm areas...

After learning the five basic leg stretches on the Ladder Barrel, the next logical progression for both men and women is to start on the *five abdominal exercises*. These exercises can also be executed on the Reformer – the Short Box Series – but some people find it easier to perform them on the Ladder Barrel. The feet fit firmly beneath the ladder bar, which stabilizes the legs and buttocks more than a Reformer strap that may be too long or too short. This series of *round back*, *flat back*, *the tilt*, *twist* and *tree* works the abdominal erectus, the transverse abdominals and the internal and external obliques – the "core" of the core.

Another popular exercise on the Ladder Barrel are *sideovers*, the area where the ever-popular "love handles" reside. Actually the fat that sits on the side of the hip gets little blood supply, these handles are incredibly hard to firm up. The *standing sideovers* are supported and therefore very comfortable on the Ladder Barrel. People of all ages and shapes and weight can do this exercise. During these *sideovers* or *sideups*, the obliques can be identified, and worked consistently in order to strengthen and lengthen the waist while firming those handles.

Pilates with Gymnastic Principles

The Ladder Barrel is a combination of the Swedish bars and sawhorse apparatus seen with acrobats and gymnasts in circuses during the late 1800's. Joseph Pilates studied gymnastics during this period and its influence and techniques are evident in the development of his method. However, nowhere is it more unchanged, or clear, as the gymnastic exercises on the barrel.

Some examples of gymnastic exercises on the Ladder Barrel, which provide a great workout for your intermediate and advanced students include:

- Horseback, working the deep and high, inner thigh muscles and lower abdominals.
- Horseback with arm weights, adding in all upper back and arm muscles.
- Backbend, working the spine extensors.
- Handstand, working the upper shoulders, backs, arms and wrists.
- Handstand is also taken into balancing, and pushups.
- Backbend into Handstand into Front Splits into Handstand into Curl-up, working, every muscle group in the body.

Still the Same - Almost

From a design perspective, Joe Pilates' initial Ladder Barrel design has remained largely unchanged over the years, utilizing the same components of the ladder, handles, and barrel. Balanced Body eventually added adjustable rails to their unit, which was a nifty innovation. Originally Joe would have customized each barrel to fit the size of the spine and length of the leg. For example, Pilates Master Eve Gentry at 5'2" had a much smaller spine and shorter bones than renown dancer/choreographer Ted Shawn, who was 6'3". The newer adjustable rails allow one barrel to fit users of different sizes, as the barrel can be brought closer or moved further away from the ladder. The rails on this model are also "ruler-marked" helping you to remember their size from the last workout.

While the Ladder Barrel is wonderful for numerous stretches and exercises, it can also improve proprioception and even help people overcome a fear of falling. However, keep in mind that Ladder Barrel exercises are contraindicated by vertigo and dizziness.

Try the Ladder Barrel. It's perfect for studios and clubs with limited space. It's an effective and versatile tool that students can get the hang of quickly and even work on by themselves. Great for your students who arrive early and need a pre-workout stretch!

