

The Carport

by

Alan Palmieri

It's 4:30 a.m. and it's the dead of winter. The temperature is a cold 22 degrees. The wind is blowing hard making it feel even colder. Sometime during the night snow blanketed the ground and it was still coming down when I got up. I get out of bed and put on a couple of baggy sweat shirts and a couple pairs of sweat pants. I head to the kitchen and mix up my protein drink consisting of protein powder, powdered milk, whole milk, ice-cream, and four raw eggs. I stand there wiping my eyes while the blender runs at high speed to mix the concoction up. I pour a glass and down it while putting the rest of the mixture in the refrigerator. Now I head to the carport for my workout... carport? That's right the carport; there was no gym around back then and we didn't have a garage or basement, so it was the carport. The carport let the heat of summer in and I would burn up while in the winter the bitter cold would just about freeze my hands to my barbell.

This morning it was so cold, I had to wear gloves to protect my hands, a hood to protect my head and face, and speed to keep whatever warmth I could generate. I backed the car out of the carport and began to set up my equipment. Since I worked out in the carport, I couldn't leave things set up, I had to break it all down and move it to the side so the car could be pulled in. Oh how I dreamed of belonging to a gym or better yet, having my own, one that was enclosed and out of the weather. Well, time to hit it and no time to daydream. I had to get my workout in and get ready for school.

An hour and a half later of heavy hard training and I was ready to unwind. I put all the equipment back and pulled the car back into the carport. Got my protein drink out of the refrigerator, mixed it up and drank another glass. Rested long enough to wish I could go back to bed but hit the shower instead. All finished and on my way to school.

Now at 4:00 p.m. I'm home from school and getting ready to hit my second workout of the day in the warmer but still cold carport. This workout is easier than the one I had earlier and at least it's daylight. There's just something about training outside in the cold when it is pitch black and the only light is a small one next to the door in the carport. If I close my eyes I can still see and smell the atmosphere. Anyway this workout is better for several reasons, not the least one being I don't have to wear two shirts, two pairs of pants, and a hood, one pair of everything will do now and I leave off the hood. I do however, keep the gloves on.

An hour to an hour and a half later I'm finished working out for the day. Shower, homework, and supper are to follow. My Mr. America magazine came in the mail today so that means I have a lot of heavy and serious reading to do before I hit the sack. I've got to get to bed early because tomorrow I start all over again at 4:30 a.m. and continue the same for the next six days... six days for the next two months that is. Wish I had decided to follow this routine in the spring or fall instead of the winter, what a poor judgment call on my part. Oh well, if it don't kill you it makes you stronger.

How's that for sheer determination and raw desire to overcome the skinny, frail, pitiful being of physical humanity I was! Didn't have the genetic potential to become a champion bodybuilder but you can't say I didn't put forth the effort. No social life or anything else that teenagers were doing back in the 60's. My life evolved around bodybuilding period. Not the cold of winter or the heat of summer kept me from my workouts. I read every magazine I could and learned all about the human body. My outlet was reading Mr. America, Muscle Builder, Iron Man, Muscular Development, All American Athlete, Vigor, later on Muscle Training Illustrated and MuscleMag Int'l. Boy I wish I still had all of those magazines. What few I do have bring back some great memories when I get them out and read 'em.

I studied my various bodybuilding courses regularly. Charles Atlas, Ben Rebhuhn's American Bodybuilding Club Lever Bell Course (which was the George F. Jowett course), the various Joe Weider courses, Dynaflex, and a few others. What I didn't

have related to bodybuilding courses in the 60's was either insignificant, was not available or, didn't matter. Each magazine and course was a treasure - read and re-read over and over. I didn't know back then what I read in print was not always accurate or truthful. It really didn't matter because they served their purpose, they helped keep me inspired and dedicated to my training. Not until later did I meet some of the greats and find out first hand things were not always as they were reported, SURPRISE... wake up!
Come out of your shell and small little isolated world Alan.

Winter was a bad time to follow my double split routine but I had started and was bound and determined to follow it through. Besides come summer I would be working and sure didn't want to attempt a double split then. Just finding time to workout would be a pretty tough thing to do. I decided weeks earlier I would wait until winter to follow the double split and it was time to see this plan through.

Today I am an early riser getting up and on the go by 4:00 a.m. but there is no way I could hit the weights heavy and hard now like I did back then. Sometime, I'm not sure when, once I hit a certain age the early morning workouts flew south, my joints just don't have the fluid they once did and they take a lot longer to warm up. Mid morning or early afternoon are my best times to workout now. Today the only time I do things early in the morning is when I follow a light specialized routine or try experimenting with something different.

In the 60's I followed almost every conceivable system and routine you can think of. Over the years I used the lessons learned back then to formulate the core of all my training beliefs and programs. I constantly experimented with everything, always trying to develop better ways of doing things. I have come to believe "no absolutes" exist in bodybuilding as individualism takes precedent over theory and trial and error reign supreme over all things in ones quest for truths in bodybuilding.

It was during those early years I learned gains come better when I did not over train or beat my muscles into total and complete exhaustion. This lesson was learned the

hard way and actually retarded the progress I could have made over the years. I learned the lesson my body had been trying to teach me for so long and was too slow to recognize it when I should have.

Naturally my energy level in the 60's was at peak performance level. I unwisely made certain I used every single drop of energy to push myself beyond the capabilities of my body. No doubt I am now paying for it with joint and pain problems up one side and down the other. Scars I and countless others wear with some sense of personal pride from our reckless years with the iron. We did what we did how we did it and today we can say, back then we did it. How's that for artistic writing.

I've related a story in other articles and included it in one of my books but it seems appropriate to relay a version of it here as I talk about over training. The name Harold Poole needs no introduction to those who are familiar with bodybuilding greats. In fact, many say he should have been crowned Mr. Olympia over Larry Scott the second time Scott won the coveted title. Poole could have trademarked the "Crab" pose as he owned it. Even today no one can hit it like Poole did.

Harold Poole appeared in almost every magazine of the day. He was in advertisement after advertisement for Weider products and his physique always looked in competition shape. I first met Harold at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York at the big IFBB show held every September. Backstage one year as we were talking I asked him, "Harold, your arms have improved greatly this past year." What have you done to get them so huge?" "Barbell Curls and Triceps Press Downs." "Yes, and... what else," I asked him. "That's it" he said. "But I do six sets of each."

This conversation with Harold taught me two very valuable lessons. First, don't believe all you read, hear, and see and second, most people including myself, were over training which will keep you from progressing as you should. Vince Gironda would become almost angry over some of my routines and yelled for me to cut back on what I was doing. "You're overtraining and you won't make a bit of progress." Vince would yell

at me. “You’ve overworked your muscles and your nerves are keeping you from making progress.”

How right both men were! In those days I was hitting my bi’s and tri’s with four or five movements each and would beat them into total submission each of my three arm workouts per week. After all... that’s what the articles in the magazines were outlining if you wanted to have huge guns hanging down your sides. My conversation with Harold made all the difference in how I approached my training. I know Vince was talking about over training before I had that conversation with Harold but it just didn’t click until I had that chat with Harold himself. I’m not certain but perhaps a lot had to do with the demographics back then. Harold was an East Coast bodybuilder and Vince, although born in Brooklyn, was considered a West Coast bodybuilder. There was a rivalry that existed between the two groups. I dreamed of going to California but the East Coast had the greats of the day and, it was easier for me to go to New Jersey, home of the great Blond Bomber Dave Draper, and New York than it would have been for me to go to Santa Monica or Los Angeles. Besides Joe Weider, Dan Lurie, the York crowd, all of what bodybuilding was about, were all East Coasters. Weider was planning but had not yet made the move to the Pacific coast and Dave Draper was getting ready to head west but was still on the east shore for a while longer.

I remember Don Howorth talking about the people on the East Coast and how they reacted to bodybuilders, especially at the contests, compared to people on the West Coast. For the people on the Pacific Coast it was no big thing to see a bodybuilder walking the beach. California contests drew family members and friends. Pretty much unnoticed and uncared for. Now on the other hand, a Larry Scott, Dave Draper, Don Howorth type walking the beaches on the Atlantic Coast would not only get stares but draw a following as well. Bodybuilding contests would draw sellout crowds and people would go wild, so much so that at times, you couldn’t even hear the person next to you. There was a big difference between the East and West Coast. Little by little it did change and California became the Mecca for all bodybuilders and bodybuilding in general but it wasn’t always that way.

If you think over training is common today you should have been around in the 60's when it was not only fashionable but par for the course to train two to six hours a day six days a week. Hitting each muscle group three times per week I might add. Gee, just thinking about how we often trained back then makes me tired. We never took the over training theory to heart. We just knew we had to bust a gut lifting all we could as many times as we could and as often as we could. That was the training style of the 60's.

Drugs did not dominate the scene although a few did experiment with them, nothing like today however. It was really not our style to use steroids and drugs to do that which our hands wrapped around cold steel and iron could accomplish. Training in the 60's was pure guts and determination. An inner pride of accomplishment one could hold onto from one workout to the next knowing whatever progress was to be made or whatever results were seen, it was achieved out of pure individual effort.

Supplements were more important than drugs or steroids. There was one big problem however, the cost. Everyone had their own taste in supplements, some never even used them. For me I was partial to Weider's products, a protein powder Rheo H. Blair promoted and sold, and some of the supplements Vince Giornda carried. They were expensive and I could only get what I could get when I could get it (another line of artistic writing genius). In the beginning the only way I could get these supplements was to order them from the magazines. There were no stores anywhere around that carried health foods or supplements like there is today.

I developed a relationship with a local pharmacist and he was kind enough to help with many aspects of nutrition and supplements. In fact, we developed a special digestive enzyme liquid that would break down the proteins, carbs, and fats of a meal. I took it with each meal and remember it tasted horrible but, to my way of thinking, that was the price I would have to pay if I expected to pack on the muscles. I'm afraid you couldn't find a pharmacist to work on such a project today. All the government rules, regulations, and laws would make it impossible not to mention the legal issues that would be hovering around.

After I started spreading out and visiting gyms and other weight rooms, I learned my carport was really not that bad. Some places were actually dangerous. Some were like dungeons, rat infested and smelled horrible. I once trained at a place and between sets had to step outside to get some air clean enough to breathe. In those days not many plush gyms were around in the south, working out and bodybuilding was still not viewed with any vision of worth, in fact, it was taboo in high school and even college. Doctors and coaches were still warning of the dreaded “*muscle-bound*” condition you would develop if you partook of weightlifting. Now even golfers and tennis players know the importance of training with weights. My have times changed.

Calf raises were particularly tough in the carport because I didn’t have a calf unit and no power rack to balance the weight as I would raise up and down on my toes which were placed on a two by four. I learned to balance myself but still had to struggle as I would go up and down. It was awkward and certainly didn’t allow for full concentration. The calves suffered because my homemade gym did not have anything suitable for calf raises. Donkeys were easy enough but I wanted to do standing calf raises. One way or another I would get the calf work in.

Full squats and Sissy Squats in super-set fashion were also a little tricky. I didn’t have a rack so I used homemade sawhorses. Where there is a will there is a way. I placed my barbell across them, piled on the plates, squatted down between the horses, stood up and moved out to begin my decent for the first rep. Low bottom out squats for 10 to 12 reps immediately followed by Sissy Squats in the 12 to 15 reps. The heat of summer was a killer on leg days in the ole carport but not as bad as winter, when the cold air would burn the lungs as I breathed in and out. I would actually have to cover my mouth with a scarf during some heavy breathing workouts in the winter to keep the cold from burning my windpipe and lungs.

In the winter, I also had a hard time performing any type of curls. With two sweat shirts on it really restricted my range of motion and I would never feel like I was getting

all I could for my efforts. Once finished however, back inside the warmth of the house, I would undress and discover the pump was there. Ah, success after all, how sweet!

Today, as I walk around the gym, gathering a bench and a couple of different dumbbells in preparation of hitting my delts with seated lateral raises, I look at the people working out and think to myself; how many would be training if they could only do it in the carport? Today with the slick new equipment, the fancy sleek clothing people wear, piped in music, a weight room that is temperature controlled so it stays comfortable year round, snacks and an assortment of drinks to choose from, and a social setting second to none. As I look around the gym floor I don't see a single soul I believe would be willing to take an early morning workout in the carport.

I drove by the old home place last week and looked at the carport I called a gym for so many years. The place I had some great workouts in. I admit a tear hit my cheek as I closed my eyes and could actually feel the dreaded heat of summer and the freezing cold of winter. It brought back memories of my family being together, before my brother and sister grew up and moved out and Mom and Dad moved due to work relocation. It was a home not a house. It was filled with the unselfish love of Mom and Dad and the love for one another my brother, sister and I share. I couldn't have better parents or siblings even if I had been able to choose them myself. I remember wishing I didn't have to workout in the carport and dreamed of a real gym. Well, I had a real gym. I have also trained at some of the greatest gyms in the country but, you know what, I sure wish I was able to go back to the carport and have everything just the way it was back then.

I advanced from the privacy of my bedroom and the following of Dynamic Tension and other free hand movements to the carport. The place of steel and iron, sweat, grunts, and groans. The carport was my first bodybuilding home. I learned to train in some of the most adverse conditions imaginable. I trained alone, no partner, no spotter, me against the weight – I got it up or else. That alone provided enough inspiration and emotion to unleash all my bodies' hormones and chemical components to make certain I would get the weight up and off. What would happen if I couldn't? Hate to think of that

and don't recall every thinking or worrying about that back then, ahhh, the foolishness of youth. It's a wonder some of us make it considering the dumb things we have done.

Then as today, training alone gives me an inner peace, a time to reflect and concentrate. Bodybuilding is an activity that will produce visible results but perhaps the most important results are those not seen by the human eye. The changes and results that come about within a person are often the most dramatic of all.

Another lesson learned from my years of bodybuilding: No matter how much or how little I complain, I am thankful for what I have no matter how great or small it may be. I cherish my memories and reflect on lessons learned as well as mistakes made and hopefully have learned not to make the same mistakes again. Honestly I don't think these lessons were learned solely from my involvement with bodybuilding, a lot of lessons are learned simply by observing what each day in our life brings. There is no doubt bodybuilding has been a big part of my life as well as one of my teachers from whom I have learned and hope to continue learning from. The carport was indeed a good classroom.

Good Training!

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