

Fit as an athlete or fit to drop?

The 2002 Commonwealth Games may be five months away, but the competitors are already well into their training programmes. So in a particularly sadistic moment we decided to put self-proclaimed couch potato **ANNE-CELINE JAEGAR** through her paces at one of the world's leading training camps to see how she matched up to the professionals

I can tell you straight off, I'm in the category of woman who doesn't even belong to a gym, let alone work out in one. I just can't stand all that indoor gerbil nonsense.

So when I was told I was going to Club La Santa in Lanzarote, one of the world's leading training camps for professional athletes, I had mixed feelings.

"Hurrah," I cried as I thought about all the sun-bathing and swimming. But then I was given a swanky pair of Adidas ClimaCools and realised these people meant business.

Here's the diary of my ordeal...

example, can keep running uphill on this test for 25 minutes.

The clipboard ladies tell me that when I get to Lanzarote I'll have to improve my aerobic capacity by doing intense anaerobic threshold training. I've no idea what they're talking about.

Day two: Boot camp, Lanzarote

We arrive late into Lanzarote and I trip into Club La Santa enthusiastically, but plans of pampering myself immediately go out the window.

Staying in an apartment in a hotel for training athletes, my room is minimalist bordering on the spartan. The only decorative element is a sign saying, "Please be quiet after midnight." And there's me thinking professional training venues were all about getting fit in the lap of luxury.

donkey into a racehorse, but we can make you the best you can be," he says. I'm outraged by the donkey reference, but I smile winningly in the hope that he'll let me off early.

Morten announces I should start with a 20-minute warm-up run. I try to tell him I could only manage 16 minutes at the fitness test, but he's off and I have to jog to catch up.

Twenty minutes later I get up from the floor and thank Morten very much for the work-out. When he tells me he now wants me to do a 30-minute intense warm-up circuit-training session I nearly collapse again.

"This is ridiculous," I rant.



Day one: Adidas Wellness Centre, Stockport

If the initial idea wasn't bad enough, before going on holiday (I mean, to the athletes' camp), I'm asked to go for a fitness test to help determine my training.

As my heart rate rarely rises above that of a hedgehog in hibernation, I feel this is slightly unnecessary. I tell them my training doesn't just start with very slow walking, it usually ends there as well. But not believing anyone could be that unfit, I'm sent along for the test anyway.

Ladies with clipboards circulate while I stand forlornly in my undies. The evaluation involves lots of questions on what I eat - to which I lie through my teeth - alongside much prodding and pricking and pumping and pulling. I wish I'd worn matching bra and knickers.

The worst part of the day is the treadmill test. A contraption resembling a Star Trek torture chamber is going to measure my "maximum oxygen uptake".

The idea is I stay on the treadmill for as long as possible. And if that's not bad enough, I'm required to run up it on an incline in a string vest with a snorkel in my mouth, a plug on my nose and a plethora of tentacles dangling from my chest.

Every three minutes, the treadmill increases its incline and speed. And every three minutes I feel closer to instant death.

Breathing becomes virtually impossible, my chest turns into a fireball, my throat dries up while spittle starts collecting in a little cup under my chin.

After 16 minutes - which I think is pretty impressive considering my usual exercise is the seven-minute walk to the train station - I give in.

I collapse in a heap on the floor for five minutes but emerge puffing, panting and quite pleased with my achievement.

The ladies with the clipboards disagree. My results aren't that bad for a woman, but they're very poor compared to proper athletes. Tour de France cyclists, for

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I take a stroll outside where I find

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everyone - from the Dutch swimming team stretching in their Speedos by the pool to the Belgian shot-putters practising their skip step - being put through their paces. The UK triathlon, swimming and cycling teams are also in attendance.

I'm introduced to my trainer for the weekend - Morten Fenger, a Danish man who looks like a cross between Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jean-Claude Van Damme. A former European Ironman champion, his idea of a gentle training session is a 180km bike ride.

Before I have time to tell him that I'm up to date on walking but need help with everything else, he reveals that he's devised a two-day training programme for me.

"What's your goal when you train at home?" he asks. I can't bring myself to tell him it's usually to stop training and buy a bar of chocolate, so instead I explain that I'm undecided about my area of speciality.

Day three: Cycling and running

Early the following morning, Morten greets me with a smile. "We can't turn a

decide I must have landed in boot camp hell and start worrying that Harvey from Fat Club might be here. I take a stroll outside where I find everyone - from the Dutch swimming team stretching in their Speedos by the pool to the Belgian shot-putters practising their skip step - being put through their paces. The UK triathlon, swimming and cycling teams are also in attendance. I'm introduced to my trainer for the weekend - Morten Fenger, a Danish man who looks like a cross between Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jean-Claude Van Damme. A former European Ironman champion, his idea of a gentle training session is a 180km bike ride. Before I have time to tell him that I'm up to date on walking but need help with everything else, he reveals that he's devised a two-day training programme for me. "What's your goal when you train at home?" he asks. I can't bring myself to tell him it's usually to stop training and buy a bar of chocolate, so instead I explain that I'm undecided about my area of speciality.

"This is a way of training at your anaerobic threshold level. Every eight minutes, when I blow my whistle, you run to the bike from the track or you jump off the bike and immediately start running. Do you understand?"

I understand all right. And I also want to kill him. Or myself. Whichever takes me out of this hideousness first.

By the second changeover, cycling feels like I'm pulling my legs out of concrete and running has been reduced to a standstill.

After a recovery run of 30 minutes (no, I couldn't believe it either) I crawl back to my room. Lying pathetically on the bed, I think about which evening holiday outfit to slip into, close my eyes to consider my options, and fall fast asleep.

Day four: Duathlon

I wake up in pain. My back feels like someone has rammed iron bars into it and my legs have less bounce than a brick.

I crawl downstairs and lie on the floor in front of Morten. "I'm ill," I tell him. "Maybe it would be best if I take it easy."

Morten ignores this and tells me that on today's agenda is a duathlon. That's a triathlon minus one of the events - in our case the swimming. In terms of distance to cover, we're talking 10km on a road bike, followed by 5km running and to finish another 10km on the road bike. Just thinking about it brings me close to tears.

After yesterday's back-to-back session,

I bet Denise Lewis never has to put up with this

getting back in the saddle is about as pleasant as being beaten with a hubcap. My bottom is bruised and, more annoyingly, 20 minutes into the duathlon I'm overtaken by two tourists on their bikes.

While I'm panting and doing my best not to be sick, they look like they're not even trying. I resist the urge to push sticks in their spokes to make them fall off.

Despite the fact I'm exhausted, Morten doesn't shut up. "You've got to push yourself even when you're going downhill," he yells. "Professional athletes would never brake on a hill. They would just go for it." I hate him more than ever and refuse to smile when he tries his Great Dane joke for the fifth time.

To make up for my wimpish behaviour, I try to absolutely peg it during the running segment of the duathlon. This sends my heart-rate monitor into overdrive, making the uphill bike ride home all the more difficult. As I fall off the bike, Morten suggests a recovery cycle session. I'm too exhausted to argue.

Back at the club, things finally start to look up. I have a sports massage and for the first time enjoy pretending to be a professional athlete. This is when I decide to really make an effort with fitness when I get home. I promise myself never to do a duathlon again, but I'll definitely get a sports massage every week instead.

That night I slip into something comfy and stroll to the pool bar to order myself a congratulatory pint of beer. Surrounded by athletes chatting about their PBs (personal bests to you and me) I realise that I'm never going to enjoy running. Except, of course, if you count the first day of the sales.

● Anne-Celine wore Adidas ClimaCool trainers, £80, which offer all-round breathability or "air-conditioning". The new technology delivers 20 per cent cooler and dryer feet compared to other products. Available from March 15. Call 0161-419 2500 for details of your nearest stockist.

Morten doing his best to kill me

