

## Chapter 7: Turbo in the Kitchen

There exists a particular breed of hope so rare, so catastrophically misguided, that scientists have yet to officially catalogue it — the kind that bursts into life mere moments before a piece of fitness equipment arrives. Not the noble, character-building variety that fuels tales of transformation. No, I mean the delusional kind, the sort of frenzied optimism that convinces you that merely purchasing an object will somehow download an entire lifestyle directly into your personality. It's the same illogical optimism that convinces a man that if he buys a guitar, he will, within a week, be smashing out stadium tours or that buying a set of chef's knives will somehow turn him into Gordon Ramsay, despite still burning toast on setting one.

It wasn't, regrettably, my first entanglement with this species of lunacy. My garage was already home to a carefully curated gallery of failed fitness romances: a yoga mat so permanently curled at the edges it resembled a taxidermied armadillo; resistance bands so intricately tangled they could be repurposed as a warning to future civilisations; and a pull-up bar that, during its brief and ill-advised residency in the doorway, tore a fist-sized hole in the plaster, damaging my ego far more than my shoulder.

The kettlebell phase had ended on the day one of the wretched things met the bones of my bare foot, prompting me to emit a sound so unnatural and primal that the dog, Bella, still refuses to look me in the eye. We don't talk about the barefoot running phase at all — chiefly because it concluded in a bog, cost me two toenails, and left me walking for a week like a constipated crab trying to cross a gravel driveway.

And yet, this time felt different. This time there were wheels involved.

It began, as so many mistakes do, with a late-night internet search: "Beginner indoor bike trainer (cheap but effective but mostly cheap)". Within minutes, I was knee-deep in gear

reviews, performance charts, and sweaty men on YouTube whisper-yelling about cadence ratios into GoPro's strapped to their own faces, all with the zeal of people who have not experienced joy in years.

My browser history quickly began to resemble the research file of a man planning an unsanctioned escape across Europe by bicycle. Words like "fluid resistance" and "flywheel inertia" were tossed at me with the casual cruelty of someone assuming I had even the faintest grasp of physics. One model boasted "progressive resistance curves based on fluid dynamics," which I assumed was either a technical marvel or an alarming euphemism. Another offered "dual-flywheel smart responsiveness," which sounded like a medical condition or the sort of feature that required regular firmware updates and the alignment of several moons.

Both looked expensive. Then, through the haze of marketing jargon, I spotted it — the perfect middle ground. Not so cheap it would explode upon contact with air, and not so advanced that it would demand my Wi-Fi password every Sunday evening. It was even on sale — slightly — if you squinted, factored in a healthy dose of denial, and ignored the "original price" they'd almost certainly invented that morning. I clicked Buy Now with the urgency of a man deleting an incriminating browser tab.

The box arrived on Tuesday. It was enormous, obnoxiously so — the sort of box that silently informs your neighbours you are either overcompensating or have bought something inflatable that will get you blacklisted from the local residents' association. I intercepted the delivery like a man smuggling contraband, timing my manoeuvre so Connie was still outside in the garden. Bella barked once; I lobbed her a biscuit and whispered "loyalty" like a mafia boss bribing a witness. The sheer bulk of the box blotted out the kitchen window light as I wrestled it through the front door. The kitchen was the only place with enough space, so I wedged it between the fridge and the back door, where it stood looming like an unfamiliar relative who's come to stay indefinitely.

Inside, the box contained a collection of metal parts, one mysterious plastic artefact, a multilingual instruction manual that appeared to have been written by a malfunctioning robot on the verge of a nervous breakdown — in every language except English. I stashed the receipt somewhere truly unfindable (admitting defeat later is always easier if you destroy the evidence first) and began my construction project.

Assembly tested not only my patience but also my engineering skill and my capacity for remaining polite to inanimate objects. Thirty-seven YouTube tutorials later, I had a partially assembled trainer, one bleeding thumb, and a dog chewing on the manual like it was a sworn enemy. I can rebuild a clutch blindfolded, but I could not, for the life of me, work out how to tighten the saddle without risking accidental castration. One bolt was labelled “secure gently,” which is not a phrase any self-respecting mechanic has ever respected. Either it’s tight, or it’s loose. “Gently” is what you do with a sleeping baby, not with hardware that will later support the weight of a man flailing in Lycra.

I phoned Dan to help me interpret one particularly vague diagram. “Is that a medieval torture rack?” he asked. “Not intentionally,” I replied. He hung up without saying goodbye. Eventually, the whole contraption stood upright — or at least stable enough not to collapse unless aggressively breathed on. All that was missing was the bike.

The bike “lived” — a generous term — in the shed. The shed door stuck as though it had been welded shut by the sheer weight of years’ worth of broken promises. When it finally gave way, I nearly toppled backwards into the compost heap. Inside was a museum of unwanted things: broken tools, deflated footballs, a garden chair that now served as luxury accommodation for wasps. The air smelled like Bella had contributed to the atmosphere. Somewhere in this archaeological site was my bike — a relic from an earlier, more optimistic version of me who had once cycled to work for two whole consecutive weeks. I spotted it by the edge of a tyre protruding from under a mouldy tarp and a tangled hose. Pulling it free felt like disturbing an ancient burial ground. The frame

was lacquered with grime, the chain rusted into a modernist sculpture, and a spider the size of a crummet had declared squatters' rights.

Dragging it inside was a cardio workout in itself, akin to wrestling Jack into his swimming kit — awkward, noisy, and liable to leave lasting trauma on both sides. It clipped door frames, scraped tiles, and left behind a brown trail of mysterious filth. I parked it next to the trainer like a teacher introducing two pupils they just know are going to hate each other.

I didn't ride that night. No, one must prepare oneself mentally for such an endeavour. Emotional preparation is the athlete's secret weapon. In this case, it meant staring at the thing while consuming biscuits straight from the packet and reassuring myself that Geraint Thomas probably did the same. The following morning, I dressed for war: compression shorts last worn in 2019 and smelling like the year itself, a hoodie designed for warming up but doubling as a portable sauna. I clipped my phone into the handlebar mount and launched the app. "Welcome to Spin & Grin: Endurance Foundations!" chirped a voice far too chipper for that time of day.

Mounting the bike was an athletic spectacle in itself. I approached it like a man trying to mount a mildly annoyed Shetland pony — cautiously, with one eye on the possible escape routes. I threw a leg over, missed the saddle by several inches, and found myself suspended in a mid-air squat, wobbling like a flamingo in a hurricane. Bella appeared in the doorway, her ears twitching in the universal canine sign for "I regret being domesticated." My foot searched for the pedal with all the accuracy of a man attempting to plug in a USB stick blindfolded. The clip refused to engage. Press, twist, press again — nothing. Eventually, more by accident than skill, one foot was clipped in, the other dangled uselessly, and my centre of gravity hovered somewhere over Belgium.

I began pedalling, knees pumping like a wind-up toy. The flywheel engaged with a low hum, somewhere between

“approaching lawnmower” and “desk fan from hell.” Bella stared at me as if she had just witnessed a crime. At the first sprint interval, she barked once, then vacated the room entirely, presumably to escape the imminent explosion. The turbo rattled like a Peugeot missing a cylinder. I adjusted a tension knob with the pointless optimism of a man tuning a carburettor on a toaster. Three minutes in, I was wheezing. Seven minutes in, a rogue spoon fell from the counter and I screamed as though the turbo had burst into flames. Ten minutes in, one child wandered in mid-rant about something involving Minecraft and the laws of armed conflict. Ellie followed, cereal bowl in hand, eyebrows raised to an altitude that required oxygen. “You know we can all hear you breathing like that?” she said. “It’s like Darth Vader got stuck in a spin class.” She rolled her eyes. “If my friends knew this was happening in our kitchen, I’d have to change schools.”

Then Spotify decided to play the Peppa Pig Greatest Hits. I sprinted — to the Bing Bong Song. Something in my soul detached and drifted into the next county. When I unclipped, my legs gave way with the theatrics of a Victorian heroine swooning at bad news. I collapsed onto the tiles like a sack of condemned potatoes. The hoodie clung to me as if trying to escape with me inside it. The floor glistened with sweat. Bella sniffed me from a safe distance, trying to determine if this was a medical emergency or just another Tuesday.

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Later, when I regained enough motor function to operate a phone, I attempted a triumphant selfie. I framed it carefully: red face, heroic tilt, just enough sweat to imply effort without causing alarm. What I didn’t notice was the collapsed hoodie draped over a chair, Bella’s rope toy lodged in the fruit bowl, and my water bottle on its side, leaking onto a roll of kitchen towel. The comments were instant and merciless: “Why does your kitchen look like it just ran a marathon?” “Is that your dog judging you in the background?” “You look like you’ve been rescued from a well.” “Blink twice if you’re okay.” “Respect for

the effort, but your fruit bowl needs therapy.” I deleted it after seven minutes. But I kept the photo. For the record.

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At 3 a.m., my calves cramped like they were auditioning for Riverdance. I woke whimpering, attempted a stretch, and accidentally kicked Connie in the shin. She muttered something ancient and profane and rolled away for good. The children, over breakfast, behaved as though nothing had happened, which somehow made it worse. They exchanged glances over cereal boxes like junior scientists observing a doomed experiment. Ellie whispered, “He’s definitely going to do it again,” and Jack nodded gravely.

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By week two, Bella had developed a strategy. During a climbing interval — thighs trembling, lungs issuing plumbing noises — she dropped her rope toy directly behind the rear wheel. One bark. I ignored her. She nudged it closer. The rope snagged somewhere unspeakable. There was a thunk, a wobble, a yelp (mine), and the whole contraption threatened to fold in on itself. Bella retreated to the hallway, eyes narrowed, rope abandoned like evidence. The message was clear: “This is not who you used to be.”

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By the weekend, Connie had begun giving the turbo setup the same look she reserved for Jack’s PE kit after a muddy rugby match. I decided to clean it. In the process, I knocked it over, cracked my shin on the pedal, spilled energy drink into the toaster socket, and created a smell so potent that Bella fled the room at speed. The entire kitchen smelled like a chemistry experiment that had lost faith. While dragging the bin out front, I ran into Steve from next door — the kind of man who owns three kinds of gloves and says things like “good composting weather.” He tilted his head. “Heard a strange noise yesterday,” he said. “Like someone using a vacuum while crying?” I nodded. “That’s

me. That's my soul on a bike." He handed me a flyer for a yoga class. I think it was a hint.

That night, Connie caught me staring at the turbo. She asked, "What are you actually trying to prove with this?" I could have said fitness. Health. Midlife reinvention. But instead I said, "That I'm still allowed to change." She looked at me for a long time, then said, "Then keep going."

And so I do. And now, with three weeks of indoor cycling under my increasingly strained belt, I stand here in my kitchen — sweat-drenched, oxygen-deprived, and yet unbowed — to deliver my victory speech. Ladies, gentlemen, and concerned domestic pets, today we mark a new chapter in the annals of human endurance. Not since the great explorers charted unknown continents has a man achieved so much while moving so little. I have conquered the brutal terrain between the fridge and the recycling bin. I have endured the searing climbs of simulated hills while navigating the treacherous crosswinds of an oscillating desk fan that smells faintly of loft dust. I have powered through the psychological warfare of the Peppa Pig soundtrack and emerged not merely alive, but triumphant. My resting heart rate remains "slightly startled," my average speed would still lose to an arthritic swan, and my dog's respect is in free fall — but my resolve is granite. This turbo trainer is no longer just a piece of equipment; it is my Everest, my Colosseum, my stage at Wembley. And when history judges me — as surely it must — let the record show that I did not quit, I did not falter, and I most certainly did not let the Bing Bong Song break me. In the grand tradition of all great champions, I dedicate this victory to my loyal supporters: my long-suffering family, my deeply judgmental dog, and the brave spoon that fell from the counter that first day and took the noise for the team. The world may not yet be ready for the full force of what I have become — but mark my words: this is only the beginning.

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