

Starting Strength

How to Lose 40 Pounds of Fat in 63 days: Part 2

How this 45-year old, Old School hardcore ironman melted off bodyfat by the bucketful

by

Marty Gallagher

Jim Steel is the consummate fitness professional: he was a nationally ranked strength athlete and played football at the collegiate level. Jim is the strength and conditioning coach for the prestigious University of Pennsylvania and routinely oversees radical physical and performance transformations for those athletes smart enough and disciplined enough to invoke Steel's ancient methods to the exacting degree he requires. It is the "exacting degree" part that is problematic for Mr. Steel. Jim is tortured in that he *knows* what works: he has engineered a radical physical transformation on himself and professionally he renovates college athletes on a routine basis. Steel knows that in order to improve the human body and improve human performance, the trainee needs to subject themselves to a series of grueling procedures in a multitude of interrelated areas, and do so for a protracted period of time.

The problematic part is the degree of commitment, disciplined effort and exactitude required to trigger true change. If the human body were easily moldable, we'd be a nation of perfect physical specimens. We are first and foremost, confused. In this day and age, ancient methods requiring great effort and disciplined precision are decidedly passé. We are urged by popular fitness experts to continually move forward, to embrace the newest and the latest, to forget that those déclassé Old School methods actually *worked*, and because they worked they survive. We live in an era of information overload. Trainees are rightfully confused about what to do in order to improve the shape and configuration of their bodies: we want more strength, endurance, vitality, power, grace, speed, stamina and agility. However, we would prefer to obtain perfection without sweating or exerting.

We suffer the curse of too many choices. With so many competing and confusing systems, with so many conflicting modes and methods, with so many weight loss strategies, with so many fitness devices and products being overly and outrageously hyped, with so many possibilities, it is damn near impossible for the sincere seeker to find the righteous pathway of pure progress. Where is that elusive super-system? Where is the golden needle of continual physical progress and improvement? It lies buried somewhere deep within a massive fitness haystack.

How can the sincere seeker find the right method, a method that delivers results? First we need to define results: what realistically should we expect in return for our continual fitness efforts? The right method is one that provides the user gains. We seek measurable improvement, we seek progress in all the related areas; we seek more muscle, less body fat, improved athletic performance. Many promise and few deliver.

Jim Steel's Odyssey

Unfortunately for humanity, when it comes to favorably reconfiguring the body, excruciating physical effort is required – this is the only way the adaptive response is triggered. Those that deliver the stark message of excruciating effort, the ice cold truth – those that offer harsh remedies, men like Steel, the truth-tellers – are not popular within the larger fitness community, where product sales rule every move, motive and action. Steel is the dagger of truth and reality twisted deep in the flabby gut of madcap lie-your-ass-off-about-results product whores. The commercial product pushers consider Jim a fitness fundamentalist – and Steel might agree, ready, willing, and able to cast the fitness money-lenders from the holy Temple of Iron.

Jim Steel has had the “muscle and strength” building aspect of the fitness equation down pat for eons. For a strange series of strange reasons, he quite recently took a 63-day crash course in body composition modification, using his own body as the test lab. His results were stunning – and all the direct result of the implementation of a simplistic exercise and dietary game plan. Intense physical effort was melded with precision eating. Steel knows what works insofar as strength training; his expertise as an athlete and coach is beyond dispute: he has squatted 800+ pounds and deadlifted 750 in official competition. And Steel knows firsthand how to achieve a 5% bodyfat level. Steel now knows exactly how to lose a massive amount of fat in a ridiculously short timeframe. This is profound knowledge. We will now relate that knowledge to you, the nuts and bolts: how one man melted away decades of accumulated body fat, and did so in an amazingly short timeframe.

Does Jim Steel's fat-burning approach have any relevance for John Q. and Mary J. Public? Probably not. The degree of discipline, deprivation, and the lack of variety, the radically increased volume of exercise needed to spur rapid fat loss, would be beyond the mental and physical abilities of a regular civilian. On the other hand, the athlete serious about reducing his bodyfat percentage in order to improve athletic performance would be well advised to read carefully how real pros go about using state-of-the-art dietary tactics to whittle off bodyfat. This approach is not “new” or “revolutionary” or “state-of-the-art” – this dietary tactic has been used for decades by those in the know.

Jim relates some background info. “My father was a professor at the University of Maryland, and Rich Salke worked for my dad; this was way back in the 1980s. Rich went on to become one of the Mid-Atlantic region's top bodybuilders. Rich got his Ph.D. and effortlessly morphed into the best personal trainer in Washington DC. Rich knows how to get fat off and has been doing it for his bodybuilding career and his clients for thirty years.” Under Dr. Rich Salke's studied direction, Jim constructed the quick-trigger training/eating matrix he would use. Rich is a pro's pro that has prepared a hundred + bodybuilders for competition.

“When I hatched this plan, I shared it with him. I got on Rich's recommended diet immediately. On October 2nd 2012 I started.” Prepare to be underwhelmed: the proven process for melting off body fat that the old Master Rich created (and then oversaw) for Jim is maddeningly plain and repetitive...

“Rich had me eat two pounds of ground beef per day, divided up into four ½ pound servings eaten at four food meals. I ate three sweet potatoes per day. These were eaten during the first half of the day so I would have all day to work off the starch. Rich allowed me to eat as many fibrous vegetables, like broccoli, spinach, onions, green beans, salads, etc., as I wanted to eat. However, I had to steam these or eat them raw – I wasn't allowed to sauté them in oil or fry them in oil, or douse them in butter or commercial salad dressing. I also drank one protein shake per day. It was a whopper containing 75 grams of protein. I drank that before I went to bed.”

- Protein with a moderate amount of saturated fat: four servings per day
- Starch carbs: three sweet potatoes eaten before noon

Jim Steel's Odyssey

- Fibrous carbs: all you want, steamed or raw (broccoli, carrots, onions, cabbage etc.)
- Protein shake: drink before bed, maintain anabolism while sleeping

“I started riding the stupid exercise bike, twice a day, for a half-hour at a time. Most painfully, I cut out all beer, entirely. Training? It stayed the same. I tried to do leg presses for like three workouts. I would do these after I squatted. I dropped the leg presses. They suck; they really do. I feel trapped in there and I would just rather squat, man. So I just added back in more sets of squats. No leg extensions, no leg curls. I did some Romanian Deadlifts for a while, for hamstrings, but I dropped them in favor of more squats. I don't even know how to use a Smith Machine. We don't even have one. I am not against lunges or front squats, I just don't like them. I have done them before and they are okay, but squats and deadlifts are what I like the best and that is that. For other body parts? Free weights, multiple sets, 6-12 reps.

“Certain exercises I cannot perform, like nose breakers or barbell curls. My elbows and flexor muscles are so screwed up from surgeries and football that I have to be smart with my exercise selection. So that meant for triceps it was dips, two-arm standing triceps extensions and I think I did pushdowns twice. For biceps I did e-z bar curls and dumbbell stuff. My shoulder has something going on with it, so I did dumbbell work for chest. Back training is fantastic and I did lots of rows and lots of deadlifts and more rows. Chin-ups are fine, but rowing 315 for reps feels better. So I didn't do chins. I dislike one-arm rows. Still, I forced myself to do them almost every back workout. I started looking forward to them after a while. Shoulders? Presses and laterals and shrugs. I started paying attention to lowering the barbell slowly and exerting great control on the eccentric portion of the deadlift, after talking in depth to Marty Gallagher.

“As he pointed out: there is tremendous muscle-building potential in the eccentric loading/lowering that contributes to more muscle growth. So why purposefully drop deadlift reps from the locked-out position and throw away the muscle-building eccentric? I added in Dorian 70-degree reverse grip deadlifts. You lower the weight slowly, until it almost touches the ground, and then you pull it upward explosively using the weird reverse grip. Some days I would walk in and just start doing set after set after set of bent-over rows, until I felt like I had that magic feeling of *really* having worked the lats, until they were decimated. Sometimes it took 10 sets before I moved on to something else, and sometimes I did 15 sets in a row, staying in the 6 to 12-rep range.” And Steel's savage weight training was the easy part of The Process.

“The worst part about the whole bodybuilding experience is the diet, for sure. You are hungry all of the time; you are weak all of the time. I mentioned this once to Rich, expecting a bit of sympathy or perhaps a pep talk, and instead he said, ‘Ah! Continual weakness and fatigue – a sure sign the diet is working!’ Basically, your body wants to shut down. You are forcing it to work and work and work. The next shittiest thing to the dieting is the endless cardio: twice a day I did 30 minutes of cardio. I used enough intensity to jack up my metabolism: I wasn't pedaling along at 60% of age-related heart rate max reading a book or watching TV – I was looking to break a ferocious sweat and end the session panting and gasping.”

- Weight training jacks up the metabolism
- Intense cardio jacks up the metabolism
- Certain foods (protein/fiber) jack up the metabolism

Jim Steel's Odyssey

“Between the lifting, the cardio and food, my metabolism was being spiked all the time. Your body just wants to eat food and sit on the couch and conserve energy until it gets some more food. But you don't let it. The whole diet thing affects your mood in a major way. Your patience level diminishes fast. As the weeks went on, I got nuts about the whole thing. I upped my cardio from 30 minutes twice a day to one hour twice a day. I did cardio seven days a week, twice a day. The lifting and cardio took it out of you in a major way.

“I eventually dropped the high-fat ground beef in favor of lower fat chicken and fish. I dropped the sweet potatoes for a week. That transformed me into a snarling Grizzly Bear not fit for human contact. But I dropped fat fast. I was never sure about my bodyweight because I refused to weigh myself. I really don't know why, I just didn't want to. Maybe I thought that if I wasn't losing fast enough, I would get pissed off and quit; maybe go get some BBQ chips and Oreo cookies. My main food fantasy was that I wanted to eat a bucket of Acme Fried Chicken, made fresh daily at their deli by that fantastic lady with the hair net and bifocal glasses...

“The two hours of cardio was a mistake. Deep down inside I knew that doing intense intervals would be better, but damn it was hard to get up for running all-out steep hills when you are exhausted and tired. Still, when I actually got it together late in the process and started doing intense intervals, exactly what I thought would happen happened: two thirty-minute intense interval sessions burned off fat far better than two hours a day done at a more moderate pace. Extreme methods work best if extreme results are expected.

“That goddamned exercise bike wears me down. Interestingly, my best cardio results occurred using my legs, running my ass off up hills. Live and learn. Throughout the whole thing, you realize that being hungry is this amazing state that only people that have been through it really understand. I suddenly had no patience for anyone who didn't have the dedication to lose weight. When someone tells you that they *just can't* lose weight, and at that very moment you would kill for one spoonful of peanut butter, your sympathy for the less-dedicated goes right out the window. Really? You *can't* lose weight? Put down the Pringles, that would be a good start. Wake up at 5 am and get on the exercise bike and pedal your ass off while listening to some hot music; pool some sweat on the floor. Oh you can't do that? Then stay eternally fat, fat person.

“I took weekly pictures and sent them to Rich. He would say, keep going, you can do it. I'd be like, 'Really?' Rich gave me three cheat meals over the course of nine weeks. This means that I could eat whatever I wanted to, for one single hour. I used to have food fantasies leading up to the cheat meal: would I have pizza and doughnuts? Vanilla cream from McMillan's Bakery? I'd tell the lady behind the counter, don't wrap them, just hand them to me in a box. My 6-year old son and I would eat them in the parking lot, and get covered in powdered sugar when we were done. Then I would get pissed off because I would get full so fast that I would have to stop eating before I threw up. I lived for those cheat hours.

“Those days you save energy and actually create a little surplus, and the next day you wake up energized and your muscles are full as hell and you feel great. My last fantastic cheat meal was five weeks before the show. When Rich said, 'No more cheat meals.' I wanted to cry. Now, how did someone who doesn't cook at all get by with all of the food preparation? Once I switched my proteins out from beef to chicken and fish, I started going to BJ's and buying huge bags of already-made frozen chicken breasts. I would microwave them four times a day. That took like six minutes to cook and I was quite proud of myself for my microwave chicken solution. When I made sweet potatoes I would make six at a time, enough for two days. I would put them in the refrigerator and eat them cold. For me, that was as close as I got to any kind of a taste treat.

Jim Steel's Odyssey

“In addition, I added in red cabbage. Raw red cabbage with Splenda and cinnamon sprinkled on top. Awesome. I needed that crunch, and broccoli didn't do it. Cabbage did the trick. My wife would make Tilapia fish for me for my last food meal of the day. I started counting the days down until the show like a prisoner within weeks of release. I was miserable, but I knew that hell or high water, I was going to Florida. Rich would text me encouraging messages. The one that I remember most was him texting, “You are tougher than the process.” That spurred me on even more. I mean, no matter how hungry or tired you are, you just do it, man. You stop at Dunkin' Donuts at night and get a triple espresso and then you eat some fish and then start pedaling that damn bike. You aren't living in a garbage dump in India with your whole family wondering if you will ever eat again. You chose to do this stupid thing, so just do it. And you do – you start pedaling and pretty soon that hour is done and then the shower is done and the next morning comes and you are pedaling again. It seems never ending.”

“You just eat the food and you just grab the bar and start lifting. If you can start the energy returns. I fueled with caffeine and this strange will to succeed. You find you have willpower that you didn't have any idea that you had in you. With less than 14 days to go until the Miami competition, I got smart with the cardio. I began doing hard intervals and added in MORE cabbage. I was eating two heads a day of cabbage. And guess what happened? I actually lost weight. How do I know this? Because 14 days out I actually weighed myself. I was 220. Seven days out I weighed 215. At the show I weighed in at 211. So looking back I should have been doing the intervals all along and should have dramatically upped my fibrous vegetable intake.

“I carb depleted and then carb-loaded; I decreased my water intake as the show got closer, all according to plan. My wife and I arrived in Florida and I did the spray tan thing, which was quite an experience. In fact I did the spray tan a total of four times. You are buck-assed naked and nobody cares; they offer you a sock to wear. I chose not to wear the sock – I felt stupid enough as it was. The show was actually cool. This was a real show, a qualifier for the Nationals. Prejudging was on Friday. We came and did comparisons and they moved me around some. I flexed as hard as I could. I was grunting and my hamstrings actually got sore the next day from the posing. On Saturday we all had a 60-second posing routine. Everybody else used some rhythm and blues crap. I posed to “Walk” by Pantera. I hit some Mentzer/Arnold poses and then they called us out and presented trophies. I finished 5th. The other guys were better conditioned, I think. They were more ripped, so to speak. But damn! It was fun as hell, all of it. The dieting was awful, awful. I guess that I was on 1500 calories a day for weeks at a time, but it was worth it in the end.”

“I didn't go to the Masters Olympia, even though I had a free pass. Instead, I went out to eat with my wife. I ate and drank so much that I actually got physically sick. More fun. It had been so long, that I just had to do it. Would I do it again? I don't think so. It was a one-time thing, I think. But I do like being in better shape and plan to stay close to 220. That's where I feel the best.”

Marty Gallagher has been a national and world champion masters powerlifter and is widely considered one of the best writers in the iron game. Since 1978 he has written over 1000 articles published in a dozen publications. He has authored more than 100 articles for *Muscle & Fitness* magazine and produced 230 weekly [live online](#) columns for the Washington Post. Gallagher has coached some of the biggest names in powerlifting and witnessed some of the greatest strength feats of the last half century. If you like his style pick up a copy of his masterwork, [The Purposeful Primitive](#).

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Jim Steel's Odyssey

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