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## Espresso Fitness Adds Legitimacy to Exergaming Trend

As a guy who writes about video games, you can imagine how my eyes lit up when I visited downtown's Boll Family YMCA last month for a workout and saw what appeared to be a row of arcade-style bike racing video games in the middle of the fitness center. The machines were made by a company called Espresso Fitness, and they looked like something you might see at Gameworks — upright stationary bikes, each outfitted with high-end computer hardware and 19" widescreen LCD monitors which displayed fully-interactive fitness games with respectable 3D graphics. I saw members breaking a sweat as they pedaled vigorously across rolling hills, coasted along brick roads suspended in outer space and chased flying dragons through a brightly-colored fantasy world. It was clear to me right then that "exergaming" had truly hit the mainstream.



Games like Dance Dance Revolution, Wii Sports and Guitar Hero are not fitness games, per se, but they boast more health benefits than the average video game because they get you up off the couch and keep you moving. Wii Fit and similar titles focus more explicitly on fitness, but also make their exercises fun and engaging. What separates Espresso Fitness bikes from these home and arcade examples of "exergaming" is that Espresso combines interactive gaming and electronic progress monitoring with solid, professional-grade exercise equipment. Espresso takes what I have always felt was one of the least fun of all workouts — stationary biking — and suddenly makes it, well, intriguing.

Brian Wolverton, Personal Training Coordinator at the Boll YMCA, likes how his facility's Espresso S3u machines help members stick to their routines. "I think [Espresso] is a good choice for us in the sense that people are always looking for ways to get distractions to keep themselves active," Wolverton explains. "Television, obviously, was one mode. Another one was music, of course, and now you have an interactive way, so you have kind of a combination of both."

What is most unique about the experience is that the interactive, multisensory approach involves both distraction and immersion. Users can plug headphones right into the machine to access several streaming radio stations in a variety of genres. The immersion occurs when players choose from over 30 virtual courses and begin to interact with the environment. Just pedaling won't cut it, as bending paths force you to move your handlebars and hills affect the amount of resistance that you feel, forcing you to shift gears located right on your handlebars. Rather than becoming detached from your workout, Espresso forces you to constantly react.

Users also become more invested by creating a profile online. Espresso handles the rest, tracking statistics, awarding virtual trophies for reaching various milestones and saving recordings of past performances that allow users to race against themselves. This is a major advantage of Espresso, according to Wolverton: "Anything that a person can do to track, either incrementally steady their goals or increasing their potential for growth, I'm a very big fan of." Espresso also offers challenges and online leaderboards that allow users from across the country to compete against each other and even win prizes. | **RDW**

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