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CLOSE-UP

The Nautilus man

Arthur Jones says that there are only three things of value in life: younger women, faster airplanes and bigger crocodiles. He is experienced with all of them. His 600-acre compound near Ocala, Fla., crawls with 300 crocodiles; he owns and pilots two Boeing 707s. And the maverick millionaire now lives with his fifth wife, Terri, 23, a licensed commercial pilot. Known for his arrogance, unsociability and gruffness, Jones, a former exotic animal importer, is able to pursue his pleasures as a result of a \$125-million fortune which he made as the inventor and manufacturer of Nautilus exercise machines.

The "state-of-the-art" Nautilus equipment is now in use in many of the 10,000 fitness centres flourishing in Canada and the United States. As well, the muscle-building machines—37 different models with an average price of \$2,640—are used by professional sports teams such as baseball's Montreal Expos, football's Toronto Argonauts and hockey's Edmonton Oilers. Jones, who is in his 60s but refuses to give his precise age, takes visible delight in his success. "People perceive me as being wealthy and having a young, exceedingly beautiful wife," he told *Maclean's*. "Those two things taken together piss off a lot of people."

Still, many fitness enthusiasts love his machines. Annual sales of Nautilus Sports/Medicine Industries, 67 per cent owned by Jones and headquartered in De Land, Fla., are estimated at \$300 million. Said Joe Cirulli, owner of the Physical Fitness Center in Gainesville, Fla., about the leading U.S. maker of exercise equipment: "Jones is the biggest driving force in physical fitness. Everyone else sells protein supplements and hype. He sold a machine that works."

Jones's physical appearance does not promote his muscle-building machines. His shirt and trousers billow on his slim, five-foot, eight-inch frame; coffee and cigarettes fuel his 18-hour days. But he

is a walking testament to stamina and endurance. A ninth-grade dropout who ran away from home in Oklahoma, Jones says that as a boy he used to worship muscle builder Charles Atlas, who claimed that other men kicked sand in his face until he built up his muscles. To emulate Atlas, Jones worked out



Jones and wife, Terri: muscle-building machines

with barbells, but his physique failed to respond. He blamed it on the barbell, a device that draws on muscle strength only in the very early stages of a lift.

By 1968 Jones had taught himself anatomy and physics and he applied that knowledge to finding a better way to exercise. After crafting dozens of weight-lifting devices, Jones handmade a pulley apparatus which, unlike a barbell, kept a variable amount of resistance on a muscle during an entire exercise.

But most bodybuilders initially dismissed his invention as ineffective and he had difficulty finding investors to back him. Then, broke and in debt from his other ventures, after 20 years of experimenting, he borrowed \$2,500 from his sister and built a prototype of his machine for a 1970 Los Angeles fitness

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show. Part of the unusual pulley apparatus resembled a seashell, so he called his invention the Nautilus. Just as the fitness boom was hitting America, his machines came onto the market. They were an instant success, and the Nautilus was soon being ordered by fitness centres throughout North America. Jones currently has 37 different models that sell for an average of \$2,640 (U.S.), and last year the company came out with a machine for the home which costs just under \$500 (U.S.).

Jones is critical of those people who initially doubted his invention. "If I had listened to the dumb-dumbs—the experts—I would not have gone into this business," he declared. "They said I did not have the capability to make my machines. As always, the experts are wrong." Now, more than 50,000 fitness professionals, including doctors, college and high school coaches, trainers and fitness centre owners and instructors, pay to attend annual muscle-building and rehabilitation seminars at the Nautilus headquarters.

Jones describes his politics as "right of Attila the Hun", and he often carries a Colt .45 revolver. He adds that there is a critical shortage of intelligent people in the world. Says Jones, "If I ever meet somebody and suspect he can think, I will just shoot the S.O.B. because it will be too dangerous to let him live." But Robert Moreland, sheriff of Marion County, where he lives, and a friend of Jones, says that the bodybuilder "is not antisocial," adding, "he just carefully selects those people he wants to associate with."

Jones's selection of animal companions at Jumbo Lair, his compound, does surprise some of his neighbors. In addition to pits full of crocodiles, the grounds reverberate beneath 90 elephants, a breeding pair of rhinos and a pacing 18-year-old gorilla named Mickey, who enjoys baseball on television. All are safely caged.

Despite Jones's open cynicism, he has given \$11 million to medical research, including \$3 million last year to the University of Florida to find a cure, or treatment, for osteoporosis, a condition of brittle bones which attacks the elderly. Added Moreland: "Jones has a gruff exterior but he is actually quite compassionate."

Some of Jones's neighbors cite the grants as proof that the prickly philanthropist does, in fact, believe that other humans' besides himself are smart. Publicly Jones disagrees. "If anybody learns anything over the years it is that he has learned, he hasn't learned anything," he said. Results gained from the grants might lead, in Jones's words, to fewer "dumb-dumbs" in the world.

—MICHAEL CHANDLER in Ocala, Fla.