

**STRANGER THAN THE REMARKABLE
NAUTILUS EXERCISE MACHINE
IS ITS INVENTOR, ARTHUR A. JONES**

IN THE **Money**



The shape of the nautilus shell in Jones' hand (and diagrammed at rear) is the key to his creation. The machine he is sitting in strengthens the stomach muscles.

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Photographs by
Thomas S. England



Jones is grooming fifth wife Terri, 20, whom he calls "Baby Girl," as a writer for *Nautilus Magazine* and host of the talk shows he is developing.



Among the 500 snakes Jones breeds as a hobby is this rarity, an albino cobra. To feed them, he raises rats and mice.

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Over breakfast at a sleepy Howard Johnson's near his 200-acre estate in Ocala, Fla., Arthur A. Jones—big-game hunter, aviator, connoisseur of crocodiles and inventor of the Nautilus exercise system, among other pursuits—was giving an attentive visitor a piece of his mind. It is a mind he has described as "64,000 miles to the right of Attila the Hun" and so fertile "it frightens people." But the glowering middle-aged woman who suddenly

materialized tableside was not intimidated. Interrupting his megamonologue—which had, in part, celebrated female pulchritude and warned of a global economic "apocalypse"—she complained that his haranguing voice had spoiled her meal. "Don't you ever stop?" she demanded.

No. Stop is not a word Arthur Jones recognizes. When he hauled his first Nautilus machine to a Los Angeles weight lifters' convention in 1970, he recalls, "no one understood it." So he latticed the country demonstrating his machines—each of which isolates a specific muscle group. As the narcissistic Me Decade bloomed, so did Jones' fortune. Today his Nautilus Sports/Medical Industries Inc. grosses \$45 million a year manufacturing equipment, publishing two small magazines, and allowing use of the Nautilus name by 3,200 fitness centers across the country. Some hundreds of other spas pay from \$35,000 to \$42,000 for a complete 18-piece set, which they proudly plant amid their potted ferns and mirrored walls. Devotees of the gizmos range from Bo Derek and Victoria Principal to such pro teams as the Boston Red Sox and the New York Jets.

Though it employs more than 500 people, Nautilus is in spirit a one-man show. "We have some design engineers," says general manager Ed Farnham. "But Mr. Jones tells them what to do. Basically, everything flows from Mr. Jones."

The most important design idea that flowed from Jones was a cam shaped

like a nautilus shell. As the weights are lifted by levers, the cam varies the resistance, reducing the pressure at the point in the arc where the muscle has least leverage and is naturally weakest and putting the full weight where leverage is greatest. Where barbells are jerky, and dangerous if dropped, Nautilus machines are safe and, as Billie Jean King attests, "really smooth."

Not resting on the success of his equipment, Jones has now licensed a line of Nautilus exercise apparel, 36 styles in all, which he hopes will give Nike and Adidas a run for their money. On a more dramatic scale, there's his \$70 million video production center at the company's Lake Helen, Fla. headquarters. Not yet worthy of its ambitious name—the Nautilus Television Network—the state-of-the-art facility churns out demonstration health-and-fitness videotapes, while its owner tries to whip more idiosyncratic fare into shape. The pilot for a combative talk show starring his friend G. Gordon Liddy, for instance, isn't combative enough. Liddy "wants to play the role of Bambi," Jones grumbles. "I think he's overreacting to his media image and trying to reverse it."

Jones distrusts his competitors ("Dozens of people are violating our patents") and seems none too sure of anyone else. Many of the 48 video monitors on his office wall, when fully connected, will be trained on the staff. He often tests his associates' stamina with meetings that adjourn at 2 a.m. Ever suspicious of the species he calls *Homo lunaticus*, *Homo maniacus* and *Homo berserkus*, he packs an antique Colt .45 at all times. "Sometimes I go from the bedroom to the bathroom without it," he allows. "But not often."

Work consumes most of the time he once spent exercising on his machines. But though balding and about 60 (he refuses to give his exact age), Jones insists, "I am at least twice as strong as the average man, and that's conservative." Certainly his diet can't take the credit. The fitness entrepreneur gulps coffee by the pot and fast food by the bagful, chain-smokes, and nibbles constantly from bowls of Hershey's Kisses and cheese puffs scattered about his office. Vitamins? "There's no harm in a daily multivitamin, but beyond that you'll just get expensive urine."

Nor does he take any great pains with what goes on his body. Though he likes to boast of a personal worth of

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Despite what people assume, Jones jokes, the toptary initials refer not to Terri and Arthur but to female anatomy.

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\$300 million, Jones tends toward drab, baggy outfits that he may not change for days.

Appearance counts, however, when it comes to a mate. Each of the five women Jones has wed was 16 to 20 years old at the altar. Of his wife since 1980, ex-model Terri Brantner Jones, 20, he says, "She's one of those rare women—the more you undress her, the better she looks." Jones quickly adds, "I was not attracted to Terri because of her looks. It was her mind."

He is assiduously developing both. An assistant at Lake Helen keeps detailed records of Terri's progress in thrice-weekly supervised workouts. And Jones has taught his wife how to use a pistol and fly an airplane. "Every time she taxis up, men are stunned," he chuckles.

"Sometimes I question it," Terri says of her new life-style. But when she's in her native Tampa "and sees what kids my own age are doing, I think I could be where they are, which is nowhere."

The Joneses divide their time between a large apartment over the video center at Lake Helen, where Jones' 40 pet crocodiles reside in a converted helicopter hangar, and their Ocala estate, which is home to his collection of snakes.

"I don't go into a square hole, a triangular hole or a round hole," Jones says. "There is no slot into which I fit. The only way to understand me is to live my life and be born me." Short of that, anyone seeking to plumb Jones' psyche may find clues in the talk show starring himself and Terri that he says he's developing at NTN. Title: *Younger Women, Faster Airplanes and Bigger Crocodiles*.

The son of two physicians (his mother completed med school while raising him), Jones grew up in Depression-era Tulsa, Okla. One thing he has in common with wife Terri: Both quit school before they were 15. Jones ran away from home, riding the rails and later joining the Navy. Afterward, for varying spells, he flew live animals to South America, imported pet shop and zoo

animals, and even kept a small zoo in Slidell, La.

In the '60s Jones stalked big game in Africa and produced and hosted a syndicated TV series called *Wild Cargo*. All the while he kept tinkering with prototype exercise machines. He had built the first one in 1948 at the Tulsa YMCA—his home at the time. Un-schooled in physiology, he taught himself by studying cadavers. Recalls his daughter Eva, 29, a New York physician and one of three children from his third marriage, "We always had an arm or something in the freezer."

Ever the eccentric, Jones has told his children they will never see any of his fortune. "Leaving it to people destroys them," he says. Eva, for one, doesn't hold it against him. To her, he is "the gentle giant." Recently she and Terri were horseback riding when Jones' Cadillac appeared, bouncing slowly and comically toward them over a rutted cow pasture. He was bringing them, she says, ice cream.

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