

Frank Zane Leg Blaster™

Review by **Brian D. Johnston**

Introduction

I am a firm believer in the philosophy “It’s now how much weight you use, but how you use it.” Anyone into bodybuilding, and I’m talking about old school bodybuilding with the likes of Zane, Draper, and Arnold know how true this is since the goal to muscle hypertrophy is to achieve a deep localized fatigue and big pump in as brief a time as possible, and that can’t be done by heaving and hoisting heavy loads like a powerlifter – a brief examination of people’s physiques who do train like that demonstrate as much; they have thickness and size, but lack the fullness and roundness in their muscles.



Frank Zane on the Leg Blaster

Hence, to eliminate joint strain and to produce the best effect, a trainee must adjust his or her mechanics so that a modest load feels tough and growth is stimulated as best as possible relative to that load. And once the load is mastered, the trainee has the choice of using heavier loads, *but also* creating unique training challenges by altering, once again, how the load is used to stimulate the trained muscle. Unfortunately, that is not how most people train, as they become obsessed with poundages rather than targeted stimulation. Further, this is why those trainees eventually complain of joint and soft tissue problems, and who cannot seem to improve their physiques although using much heavier loads.

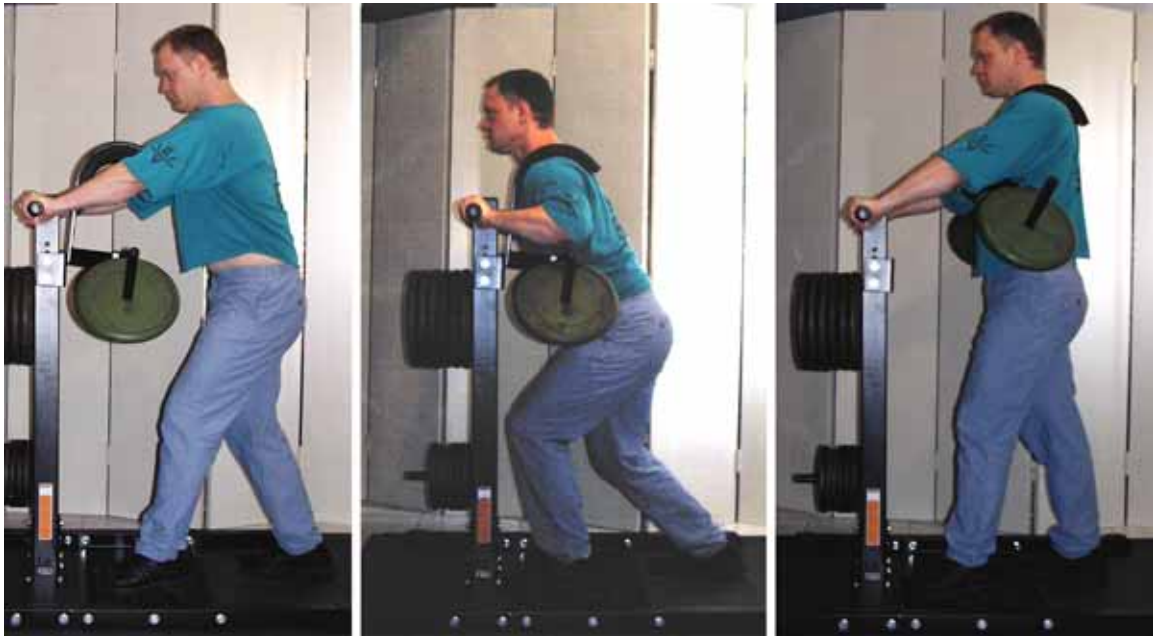
Frank Zane quickly grasped the above notions when he began marketing the Leg Blaster™, as his days of squatting were coming to an end. The body can take only so much abuse! Having seen this device advertised in magazines for at least 15 years, I thought it nothing more than another tool, although I was curious – only modestly curious since I was still young and able to exploit my body's resilience with traditional lifts, like heavy back squats. However, and eventually, every old dog is forced to learn new tricks.

For me this meant resorting to Smith machine squats (to ensure a more upright torso and less low back strain), and more work on leg press and leg extension machines. Although a step in the right direction, the spinal loading on a Smith machine still existed to a degree I preferred it not to, and no number of leg presses and leg extensions can take the place of squats. There simply is something 'special' about squats, and I suspect it is the synergistic effect of how the many lower body muscles work together, shifting strain from one angle to the next, to provide an overall and superior growth stimulating effect. With a leg press, the body is locked into a more confining plane of movement. Similarly, and for whatever reason, there seems to be a more pronounced growth-producing effect when the body moves during exercise as opposed to when the body remains stationary and the load moves. The superiority of chin-ups as opposed to pulldowns is one example, and the same is true of parallel bar dips as opposed to machine dips and, of course, squats as opposed to leg presses.

Basic Concept of the Leg Blaster™

In a nutshell, the idea of the Leg Blaster™ is to reduce spinal loading and low back involvement, to maintain form for longer throughout a set, and while placing greater emphasis and targeting on the quadriceps... directives very difficult to achieve with regular squats, and particularly as the working muscles fatigue. Spinal loading *is* important in exercise, since specific and direct loading of any bone in question improves bone density and reduces the risk of osteoporosis, and this is true, as well, of the vertebrae. And so, although spinal loading exists with the Leg Blaster™, the strain experienced is a fraction of that with barbell squats. My usual work load on a Smith machine squat is about 275-pounds, whereas 150-pounds is very challenging on the Leg Blaster™ (which suggests the degree to which gluteal and low back leveraging is involved in back squats).

The metal-framed, padded harness sets in the frame's upright post (a tongue-and-groove assembly) to permit loading of weights and for the trainee to move in and out of the equipment with ease (photos 1-3). The harness fits over the shoulders and distributes force throughout a far greater area than a barbell (photo 4), with the side weight-bearing arms angled downward to give a lower center of gravity, thus making it easier on the knees and lower back. The harness' design also instills proper lifting as a trainee remains upright or leaned slightly back so that the front of the harness remains in contact with the torso. In effect, leaning forward causes the harness to tilt or move forward and you can feel when this happens. If it moves forward too much, the harness will touch down on the thighs when in a very low squat position an indicator that Leg Blaster™ form is improper.



Photos 1-3: Getting into the Leg Blaster requires only that you dip under the harness and lift it straight up out of the slot.



Photo 4: A front view of the Leg Blaster weight harness.

While hanging onto handles, proper positioning is guaranteed simply by keeping the arms straight and locked at the elbows, as this pushes the torso back and in place throughout the set (photo 5). In doing so, the torso cannot move forward.

And then (for those who do not abuse the idea and use the machine like it was a powerlifting rack) a slight unlock of the elbows will permit a modest forward lean of the torso, thus allowing a trainee to perform even more repetitions for a final pump-out (photo 6). However, effort still should be made to remain as upright as possible and I recommend this technique only to make exercise more demanding by extending the tension time.



Photo 5: Proper arm and torso positioning necessitates the arms remain locked, thus keeping the torso upright or tilted back slightly for greater quadriceps emphasis and minimal strain on the gluteals and low back.

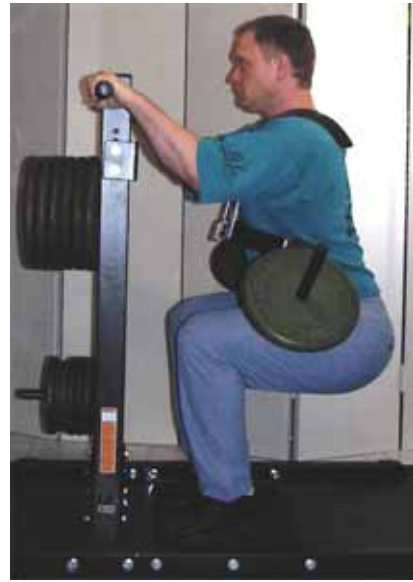


Photo 6: Although considered improper form for the most part, allowing the arms to bend and the torso to move forward slightly allows a trainee to squeeze out a few more reps at the end of a set with assistance of the gluteals.

Exercises possible include squats of various stances, but also sissy squats (photo 7), and lunges (photo 8). Even calf raises can be performed by adding a calf block (photo 9). Moreover, and this is true particularly of squats and sissy squats, slight adjustment as to where the feet are placed (a bit more forward or backward) shifts effort on the thighs to customize the tension relative to the mechanics of the body. Doing so allows fine-tuning for preferred feel for fitness enthusiasts, but which fine-tuning makes the Leg Blaster™ an ideal apparatus for natural movement during rehabilitation work of knee injuries.



Photo 7: You won't need much weight when performing sissy squats on the Leg Blaster!



Photo 8: Because of strictness of mechanics, the most challenging lunges are on the Leg Blaster.



Photo 9: Place a calf block toward the front of the machine for comfortable calf raises.

Some Added Features

Within ten minutes you can assemble the Leg Blaster™, which takes very little space – ideal for use in small training centers and home gyms. The machine comes with Olympic sleeves that remove easily to accommodate standard one-inch holed plates, which is fortunate since I had 250-pounds of standard plates lying around collecting dust. The third feature is one of personal preference – leg training is the most uncomfortable and demanding of all the muscles, and the more variety (exercise choices) available, to keep the mind motivated, the easier it will be to push the lower body to its uppermost limits in muscular size and strength.

As well, Frank had the Leg Blaster™ re-designed. Now, the *Leg Blaster Elite* is made of heavier steel (11 gauge as opposed to 14 gauge); is 2 x 2 steel all around; has a solid 1-inch plate holder all around (so that you can use Olympic and/or standard plates at the same time); the balance bar is a solid 1-inch for a good feeling grip; has only a 3-bolt assembly (as opposed to the 18 bolt rack assembly), and the rack is welded solid to the horizontal member (that meets with the footplate).

Although effective on its own, the Frank Zane Leg Blaster™ provides that added edge and dimension to leg training that previously was limited to leg extensions, leg curls, leg presses, and (if your joints are still young enough) the rigors of traditional squats. At a price affordable for nearly any home gym or fitness studio, no longer will there be the excuse “I don’t do squats because they bother my low back and knees.” Now, the only excuse not to squat and lunge will be laziness and apprehension toward the more challenging thigh exercises of the Leg Blaster!

For further details and to order, visit www.FrankZane.com or call (800) 323-7537. Mention this review when ordering and receive a **FREE** *Frank Zane Training Video*, valued at \$39.95.