

taming the terrific

Moxie isn't my middle name. I cover my eyes during scary movies. I get woozy at a mention of the word "blood." But when I watch a biker barrel downhill at breakneck speeds, I'm secretly envious.

Why not try it, I thought. Wouldn't it be cool to feel the wind hit my face and my body tingle with excitement? Cruising down a mountain on two wheels certainly makes a better story than going nowhere on a stationary bike. Besides, I'm curious: What makes it so addictive?

Perhaps the real question is: Why would anyone risk life and limb in pursuit of a "rush"? Adrenalin junkies say you have to feel it to know. Imagine being in the middle of the action, paddling over roaring rapids or surfing down a snowy mountain. You're on the edge of control. On top of the world. Even better is the way you feel afterward. Strong. Confident. Alive. It changes you. You're forced to stop and *think* Am I happy? Is this where I want to be in my life?

I wasn't interested in a one-time thrill ride. My goal was to learn a new skill and get a workout. Mountain biking seemed a no-brainer. I already had wheels and easy access to the Santa Monica Mountains. And it didn't sound *too* hard-core: I didn't want to spend the next six months in a body cast.

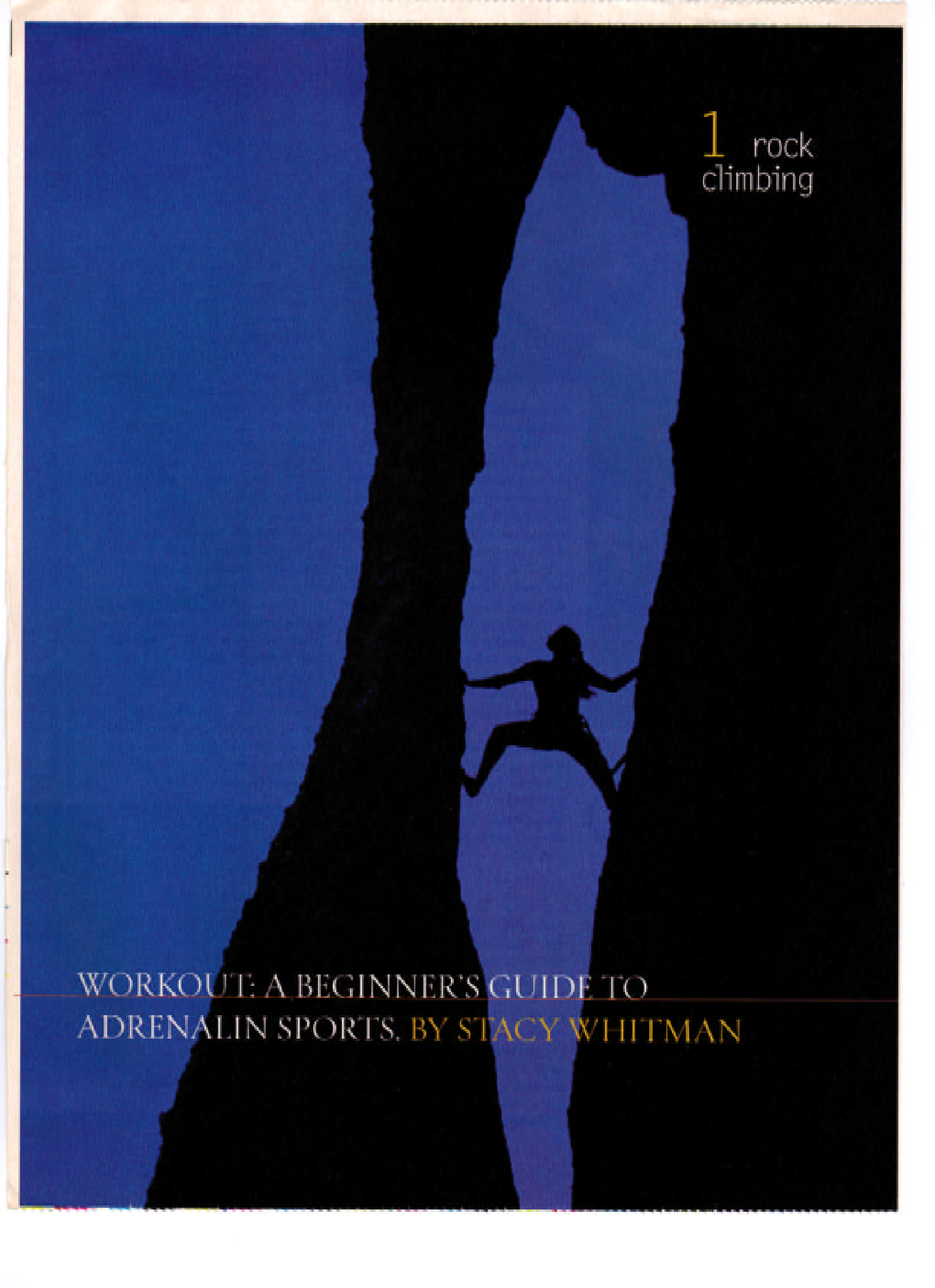
So I planned a trip to Moab, Utah, the country's mountain-biking mecca, and hooked up with a trusty guide who would show me the ropes. A wise move: Thrill sports are dangerous, after all. No matter how intoxicating the ride, it isn't worth a trip to the emergency room.

And that's how I got hooked on mountain biking. (To find out how I fared on my ride, see page 117.) Looking for a fix, too? Here, a beginner's guide to what we call the Terrific Five — rock climbing, surfing, mountain biking,

GET A RUSH AND AN INCREDIBLE

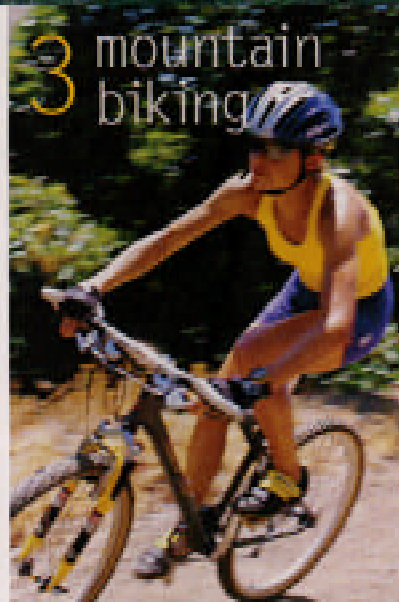
white-water kayaking and snowboarding. Remember: A sport that terrifies one person may be cake for another. A lot depends on your own fears, the difficulty of the terrain, your fitness level and your outlook.

So blast off into the new year. Begin by taking some lessons to get your feet wet and learn necessary skills. Then take the plunge. You *can* do it. Here's how.

A silhouette of a person rock climbing a narrow crack in a dark rock face. The climber is positioned in the center of the frame, with their arms and legs extended to grip the rock. The background is a clear blue sky. The overall mood is adventurous and athletic.

1 rock
climbing

WORKOUT: A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO
ADRENALIN SPORTS. BY STACY WHITMAN



taming the terrific 5

1. ROCK CLIMBING

Rush factor: **★★★★**

Anyone who's been pressed against a jagged rock, dangling 50 feet in the air, knows that rock climbing is a heart-stopping test of true grit. Unlike other adrenaline sports, it isn't about speed. It's slow and methodical. Every step involves problem solving and balance.

That's not to say you don't feel a rush: But for many people, it comes from a feeling of frustration. There's nowhere to put your hand. Nowhere to put your foot. Your arms ache and your fingers are slipping. You wonder

if a rescue team will have to fly in and airlift you to safety.

What else causes the adrenalin to surge? *Just look down.* If you get scared sleeping on the top bunk of a bed, rock climbing probably isn't for you. Many people also fear that the person holding the climbing ropes will let go or their equipment will fail.

Truth is, if you use the proper gear and use it correctly, climbing is actually quite safe. Which leaves you free to enjoy the perks: The joy of discovering a hidden hand or foothold. The satisfaction and pride of doing something you think you can't. The view from the top.

What you need: Upper- and lower-body strength, balance. **Equipment:** harness, ropes, helmet, climbing shoes. **Where to go:** Woodswomen, 25 West Diamond Lake Road, Minneapolis, MN 55419-1926, (612) 822-3809. Women's-only clinics for beginning to advanced climbers, April through July. Cost: \$55.

2. SURFING

Rush factor: **★★★★**

You're half-naked, soaking up the rays. You wonder if your bikini top will survive the next wave. Then a swell starts to rise. You paddle hard. As the wave crests, you push yourself up, place one foot out in front and crouch, keeping your center of gravity low and your eyes on the beach. Your board shoots across the moving wall of water. Spray hits your face. For a split second, life stands still.

"You're at the mercy of the wave,"

says Margo Oberg, a seven-time world surfing champion. "It's a state of mindless surrender."

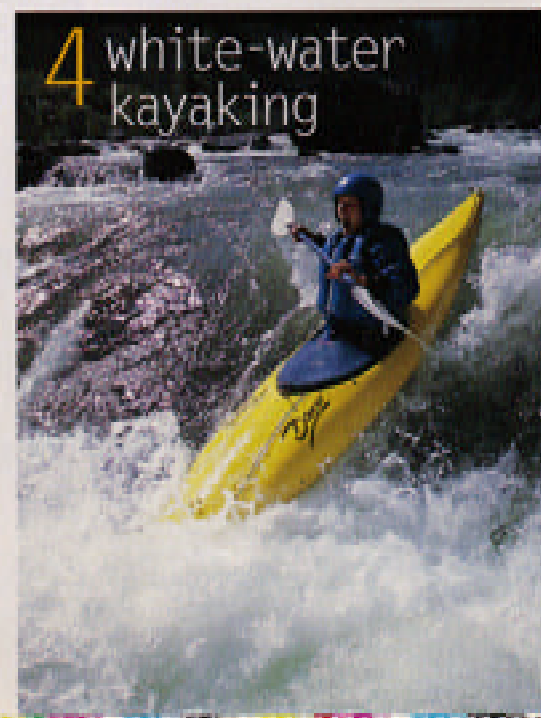
There's something divine about walking on water. But the thrill of surfing also comes from the speed and the fear. "Every wave is different, and you don't know how fast or where it's going to take you," Oberg says. "There's a sense of both power and powerlessness." Some call it sensual. Others intoxicating. One surfer says it's better than sex. *Dude.*

At the Margo Oberg Surfing School on the Hawaiian island of Kauai, students learn on rubber surfboards with leashes and wear wet-suit booties. Oberg says the risk of injury is almost zero. But even if you don't get hurt, be prepared to get sucked under, twirled around and spit out like a hapless fish. *It happens.*

One of the best things about surfing (besides the fact that it's *too cool* for words) is that it's easy to learn. Many surf schools guarantee you'll catch a wave in one day, though it may take a week or two of practice to get the hang of it.

What you need: Upper- and lower-body strength, endurance, balance. **Equipment:** Surfboard, leash and, sometimes, a wet suit.

Where to go: The Margo Oberg Surfing School, Poipu Beach, Kauai, HI, (808) 742-8019. Cost: \$45 (includes a 90-minute lesson and equipment rental).



PHOTOGRAPH (counterclockwise from top left) ARON CHANG, ROBERT WHITMAN, CHACO, MICHAEL MOUNTAIN STOCK, DAVID HISE/PHOTOGRAPHERS ASPEN

3. MOUNTAIN BIKING

Rush factor: **●●●●**

When I made my pilgrimage to Moab, a mountain-biking hot spot in southeastern Utah, I had no idea what I was in for. Towering red rocks lined the road into town. People from all over the world come here to test their skills on the famed Slickrock, the gnarliest biking surface on earth: a roller coaster of sharp dips and rises that are as slippery as ice. Not exactly terrain for beginners.

And I was a novice, all right. I'd never made a point of trying out my bike off-road. I don't really like going fast or getting dirty. During a rare outing with an ex-boyfriend, I hit a rock and catapulted into a trail-side pile of manure. Needless to say, I prefer the predictability of wide, paved roads.

So when I saw the sign at the head of the Slickrock Trail — "This trail has steep slopes and exposed cliffs. Advanced riding skills recommended." — I frowned. Maggie Wilson, my guide and an instructor with Rim Tours, a Moab mountain-bike outfitter, was reassuring. "I'll be right there with you," she said. "Just ride the bike like a horse. Let it do the work. And don't ride the brakes too much."

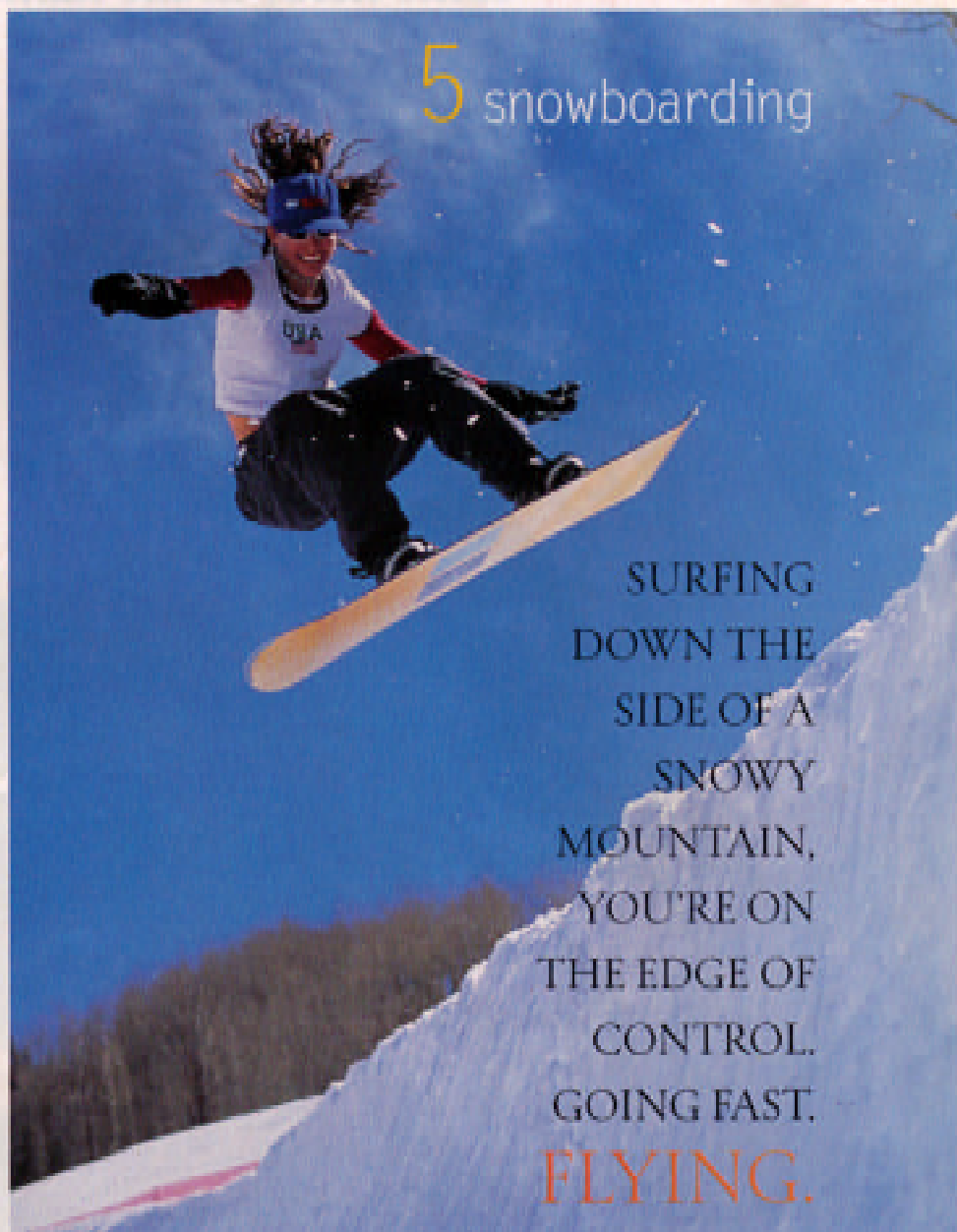
But the moment I careened down the first slippery slope, her words were forgotten. Instinctively, I squeezed the brakes, causing my back tire to skid. My heart pounded. I stopped and got off. Great conversation piece or not, I didn't need another scar to add to my collection. "You need to trust the bike," said Wilson, who waited up ahead.

The next hour went something like this: Ride a few feet. Stop. Get off. Push the bike. Get on. Ride a few feet. Get off. Push. It must have been 100 degrees. The hot, dry air stuck in my throat. My eyes welled up. Rosy-colored rock spread as far as I could see. It looked like the windblown Sahara, only this surface was solid, and it would do serious damage if I took a digger.

But I didn't want to quit. I wanted to get it — and love it — so I could go home and hit the trails. I didn't

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5 snowboarding



SURFING
DOWN THE
SIDE OF A
SNOWY
MOUNTAIN,
YOU'RE ON
THE EDGE OF
CONTROL.
GOING FAST.
FLYING.

Are You Ready for a Rush?

Before packing your bags for an adrenalin adventure, make sure you've tackled some basic issues:

- You really want to do it (translation: your boyfriend, girlfriend or guide didn't talk you into it).
- You know what your fears (water, heights, speed, etc.) are and feel prepared to face them.
- You can laugh at yourself. Remember: Looking silly or feeling like a failure often comes with the territory. It's trying that counts — not making it to the top, going faster than your friends or doing it perfectly the first time.
- You don't mind getting dirty or breaking a nail.
- You feel totally comfortable with both your instructor and your equipment. If not, don't do it.
- You aren't ashamed to ask questions.
- You're not too scared. Overwhelming fear should not be ignored: It may signal the existence of serious danger or cause you to freeze under pressure.

Taming

(continued from page 117)

want to be left behind while my friends headed off to pedal in serene, smog-free settings. *Don't be a wimp*, I thought. I got back on the bike and pushed off.

Seconds later, my bike plunged down a steep slope. Let it go, I reminded myself. I leaned back to balance my weight over the seat. *You're going too fast! Hit the brakes!* my instincts said. I held my breath. But the bike bounced forward. Miraculously. Unbelievably. Beautifully.

I felt victorious. I headed up the next hill. When the front tire started to lift up, I leaned forward. Now pedal! *Hard!* As I crested the ridge, my stomach did a back flip. Straight down! I eased up on the brakes. The bike rolled on. I just needed to lean back and let it do its magic.

"Want to keep going?" Wilson asked. "Sure," I lied. We continued on. Later I was glad: With every hill, I got more courageous. I was even having fun. This was advanced terrain, and I was kicking butt!

On the way back to the trail head, I whizzed past two guys who were walking their bikes like I had hours before. The dust that covered me was like a trophy. And the corners of my mouth curled up in a smile.

What you need: Upper- and lower-body strength, endurance. Equipment: bike, helmet, water bottle, repair kit.

Where to go: Rim Tours, 1233 South Highway 191, Moab, UT 84532; (800) 626-7335.

Where to crash post-ride: Sunflower Hill Bed & Breakfast Inn, 185 North 300 East, Moab, UT 84532. (801) 259-2974. Cost: \$85-\$155 per night (double occupancy; rate includes breakfast) in season (March through October).

4. WHITE-WATER KAYAKING

Rush factor: ●●●●●

Call it the calm before the storm. A paddler gently strokes the water. Sunlight dusts the trees. Then a sound of

forebodings: Rushing water can be heard in the distance. The kayaker's pulse races as she's swept downstream. Who knows what the river bend will bring?

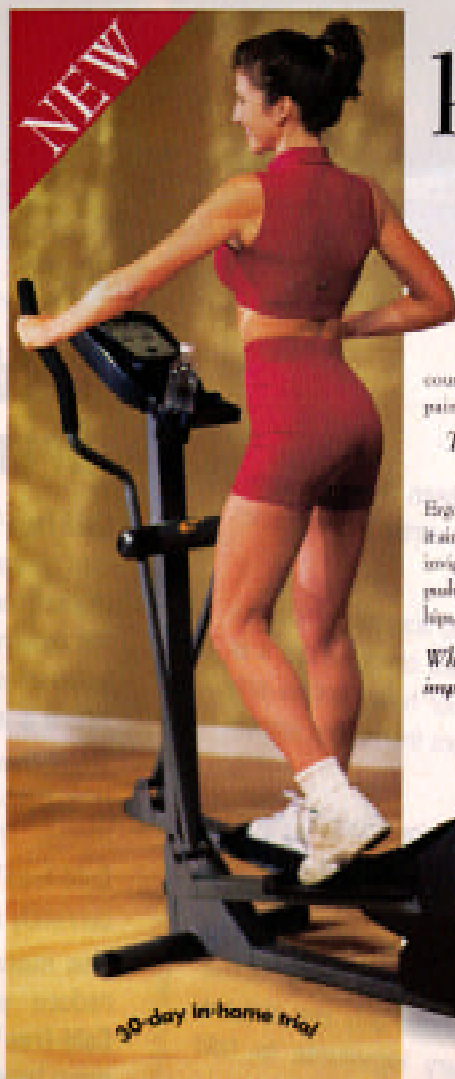
Anticipation is only part of the rush, however. The rest comes from fast moving water and fear. What if the kayak flips? What if you can't get out? Your lower body is enclosed in a sealed cockpit, after all. And keeping the kayak upright as you maneuver through menacing rapids requires know-how and practice. Even if you aren't afraid of water, you'll likely experience the dread of being trapped

in a capsized rig as white water rages all around.

But safely negotiate a set of rapids and you're rewarded with a sense of relief and the thrill of victory. You've relinquished control to the river and come out on top.

It doesn't take long to learn the basic strokes or how to roll a kayak or do a "wet exit" (freeing yourself when you're upside down and under water). In fact, you should be ready to face the rapids after a couple of days of instruction. But don't try this on your own: For beginners, kayak school is a *must*.

What you need: Upper-body



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Taming

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strength, balance. Equipment: A kayak, paddle, helmet and life vest.

Where to go: Otter Bar Kayak School, Box 210C, Forks of Salmon, CA 96031, (916) 462-4772. Seven-day program includes instruction, gear, lodging and food. April through September. Cost: \$1,490.

5. SNOWBOARDING

Rush factor: **1 1 1**

It's more than the cute little boots and the guys with goatees. It's the rhythmic feeling of rocking back and forth. The cold wind that makes your cheeks turn pink. The *wooshhhhh* as you fly down the mountain. Step onto a snowboard and you'll see.

It's no accident that snowboarders have taken over the slopes. Boarding combines the thrill of going downhill with the challenge of riding a wave. It's fast and fluid. It's easier to learn than skiing. And no poles are required: It's just you, the board and a snow-covered mountain.

But learning to snowboard is almost like learning to walk: You're going to fall often, and hard. Catch an edge, and you'll suddenly be coughing up snow or plucking it from the depths of your ski pants. That's why a basic taught at snowboarding school is how to wipe out without getting hurt (i.e., not breaking your fall with your hands).

All that falling can get frustrating, but you quickly reap the rewards. Many first-timers successfully make their way down the mountain after just a few days of practice. Lessons aren't essential but are recommended so you don't have to unlearn bad habits later.

What you need: Upper- and lower-body strength, balance. Equipment: snowboard, boots, bindings. Consider wearing a helmet, wrist guards, and elbow, knee and butt pads even though specialized gear is not available yet.

Where to go: Delaney Snowboarding, P.O. Box 4488, Boulder, CO 80306, (800) 743-3790. One- to five-day programs from November through April, in Aspen and Vail/Beaver Creek, Colo. Cost: \$465 (\$545 with lift ticket). ■

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