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Stroll and go

Parents point their strollers down the path to fitness at an exercise boot camp held in Yarmouth.

By RAY ROUTHIER, Staff Writer

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Photos by John Parquin/Staff Photographer
Catherine Culley and her daughter Quinn, 11 months, lead a group of mothers along an exercise path in Yarmouth's Royal River Park under the eye of Casey Ericson, right, during her Stroller Boot Camp.

Casey Ericson paces back and forth behind a row of occupied baby strollers.

She moves from stroller to stroller, gently rocking those with crying babies until they grow quiet. At the same time, she shouts encouragement to the baby's mothers, who are doing toe taps nearby.

"OK, just some toe taps on the curb to get the heart rate up," says Ericson, as the women alternate tapping each of their feet atop a 6-inch curbstone. Then she beckons the moms to push their strollers, babies and all, and begin a brisk jog down the winding, wooded paths of Royal River Park in Yarmouth.

"Let's have perfect stroller posture, nice and tall, nice light grip," yells Ericson as the stroller line moves out.

Before the hourlong class is over, Ericson and the 10 women taking her Stroller Boot Camp exercise class will jog, sprint, kick and knee-bend their way around the park. Every few minutes they'll stop, park the strollers and do more exercises as their children watch, giggle at each other or sleep.

Ericson's course, offered through Yarmouth Community Services since early May, is part of a growing trend. Companies such as StrollerFit, Baby Boot Camp and Stroller Strides offer similar courses across the country.

The appeal of such classes seems to be that parents of small children can get some exercise, get out of the house and into the fresh air, and still be with their children. The class is open to dads too, though only mothers were participating on a recent Tuesday morning.

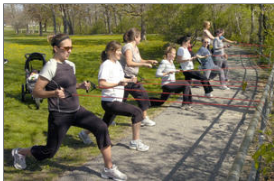
"It's nice to be able to come to a class like this and bring them with me," said Ellen Cady of Yarmouth as she pushed a double stroller carrying 2-year-old Chloe and 4-year-old Hope. "Plus we can walk here, and I get to meet all these other moms."

The origins of Stroller Boot Camp can be traced back several years, when Ericson was teaching exercise classes in California and incorporated a stroller class for parents. After moving to Maine and having her third child, Harper (now 6 months old), she decided to offer a similar class in Yarmouth.

Ericson holds classes at 9 a.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. A 12-class punch card costs \$145, and other pricing packages are also available.



Jennifer Mancini, right, runs toward her stroller containing her daughter Lizzie, 10 months. The mothers park their strollers and then run up the hill and back a few times before continuing on the path and the next set of exercises.



Casey Ericson, fourth from left, leads her Stroller Boot Camp workout along an exercise path in Yarmouth.

The last scheduled class of the summer will be Aug. 15. People aren't required to pre-register: they can come to a class, try it and sign up for classes afterward if they like it, Ericson said.

Some moms in the Tuesday group had taken Ericson's other classes for women, Maine Adventure Boot Camp. Stroller Boot Camp includes exercises performed while pushing strollers, such as knee bends and kicks, and without strollers, such as stretches, abdominal exercises and sprinting.

Sometimes at Royal River Park, they used a fence for balance. In one exercise, moms ran up and down a hill and were told by Ericson to "kiss your babies" when they reached the bottom. (Most moms blew kisses.)

At one point, the moms were told to sprint up a hill in the park while pushing their strollers. Then they jogged down, and sprinted up again three or four more times.

Cady, who was pushing a double stroller weighing at least 25 pounds and two kids weighing 50 or 60 more, probably had the toughest go of it.

"It's similar to circuit training in the sense that you raise your heart rate between sessions with cardio exercises in order to maximize the results of your strength and toning exercises at the various stations," Ericson said.

Ericson had all three of her children — Harper, 2-year-old Zachary and 4-year-old Alexandra — with her while teaching. Other women in the class helped by pushing at least one of Ericson's children in a stroller.

The class ended with a series of exercises performed while lying on mats near the tennis courts. Several of the older children went running into the adjacent baseball field while their mothers worked out, with Ericson pacing to keep an eye on them. Other moms took their infants onto the mats with them, letting them rest either beside them or on their bellies.

Andrea Connor of Falmouth had her 10-month old daughter, Lilah, crawling under her legs and onto her stomach during her final workout of the class. Connor said the workout was fun, but maybe a little tougher than she expected.

"Sure, I wish it was a little easier," she said, smiling after the workout was finished. "It was really nice not to have to bring (Lilah) to a baby sitter to be able to do this."

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