



Patience: Jenny (left and above) in the Hapkido thick of it PIC: DANIEL LYNCH

Sure beats spin class

Jenny Stallard tries Hapkido, the secret martial art that's making a name for itself

WHEN my friend asked me to try Hapkido, I was nervous: I've done some body combat-style classes but never a martial art. And my knowledge is limited: I know Chinese martial arts are known as kung fu and that judo hails from Japan. So what's Hapkido? Well, it's Korean and it's non-contact. There's a short stick, known as a tahn bong, which only black belts are allowed to use. Mainly, though, I was pleased to learn that, as a newbie, nobody was going to fight me.

What's surprising (and refreshing) as I step into the training room is the way everyone is obedient to the commands of master instructor Tammy Parlour. She's not fierce with students but there is bowing and every time she gives an instruction, there's a quick 'yes maam!'. People do as they're told.

Things kick off with meditation and a tai chi-style warm up. Next we run through a series of kicks, punches and elbow strikes: it's working the muscles and getting the heart rate up.

Tammy, 45, started training with Korean grandmaster Gedo Chang in the US when she was just 12. I ask her about the appeal of this more regimented way of exercising.

'Hapkido is a complete system teaching kicks, punches, pressure point techniques, throws, joint locks, weapons, free-fighting, ki [energy flow] and meditation,' she says. 'Many other martial arts are "hard" – they rely on physical power and

are offence-oriented. Hapkido is "soft" and defensive. Other martial arts emphasise tournaments, street-fighting and competitiveness. Hapkido emphasises self-discipline and personal development.'

I think Hapkido appeals because the gym doesn't always do it for people. It's still a strong workout – pretty much non-stop for an hour – but there's the added purpose of learning discipline and a skill. Because it centres on developing positive mental and physical habits, it has relevance in the real world, too. 'It can become a way of life,' says Tammy, 'a way of keeping our mind and body functioning optimally in a stress-filled world.'

I try throwing someone, a skill that takes time to learn. I wonder if I'd ever be patient enough to keep going, or whether the patience is part of the learned practice. I threw well, apparently, but it's all about learning. 'Practice and repetition is key,' says Tammy. 'Without that, nothing will remain at a good standard. I also believe there is always room for improvement. One of my

favourite quotes is from the legendary cellist Pablo Casals, who was asked why he continued to practice at age 90 and replied: "Because I think I'm making progress."

With the peaceful feeling I take home, I can see why people get hooked on this quietly determined method of getting their exercise kicks.

Jenny trained at Chang's Hapkido Academy, which has schools in London and Lincoln. For free taster session, visit changshapkido.net



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