



Pet project: Helen Croydon (above) found the daylight dancing and bum thrusting tough
 PICS: RICHARD MURGATROYD



Free fitness fun – **AWESOME!**

A new keep fit project has **Helen Croydon** dancing in public at the crack of dawn

THERE'S just a hint of pre-dawn light as I approach the belly of London's 'Scoop' – a sunken oval amphitheatre alongside the river Thames in London Bridge – and I can hear chanting. As I make my way over I see around 100 people, of all ages, standing in a circle, holding hands. They are doing synchronised squats, taking it in turns to shout out their name every time their bums thrust downwards.

I'm late, so I apologetically break into the circle, take the hands of the two people next to me and bob up and down yelling 'Helen!' at the top of my voice when it's my turn. Dance music is blaring out. It's not even 7am yet.

Fear not, this isn't a cult, just a fitness class. But you're not allowed to call it that. This is Project Awesome and it's supposed to be an hour of fun, not a training session. There are hugs, high-fives, chest bumps and Mexican waves choreographed with tuck jumps. Every time the instructor rings a cowbell, everyone stops what they're doing and dances like a lunatic for 20 seconds.

But wasn't all this super embarrassing? Well, when the cowbell rang and we had to dance, I bowed my head in shame. It's like getting on the dancefloor at a wedding, only it's 7am and I'm sober! We attracted the most stares from passers-by with the

chanting squats. I just made sure I had my back to the public walkway.

It sounds crazy, but after launching in London a year ago it's attracted such a following that this week it set up shop in Edinburgh and Bristol. In January, expect squatting circles popping up in Sheffield, Manchester, Birmingham and Cardiff.

Project Awesome is the brainchild of adventurer Danny Bent. He's no wallflower when it comes to fitness challenges; he was a finalist on the BBC's Ultimate Hell Week and has cycled from London to India and the breadth of America. 'People often wake up the day after Project Awesome and feel like they've been in a car crash,' he says. 'But it's disguised as fun. The endorphins distract from the pain.'

Each Project Awesome session utilises the terrain. Some sessions involve running up hills but, to distract from the effort, Danny has a tarpaulin sheet, smother it with fairy liquid and everyone slides down.

Post-workout coffee and camaraderie is de rigueur. 'All sorts of adventures have been planned over breakfast after these sessions,' says Danny. 'Two guys arranged a rowing expedition to the Amazon the first time they met. People don't come to work out, they come to hang out but they accidentally get fit.'



Flower powered: Danny Bent

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