

When it comes to choosing a gym for serious bodybuilding or powerlifting, one would be hard-pressed to select one better than The Training Center in Newcastle, Delaware. Still, when Big Al Fortney arrives to train legs, even the most well-equipped gym would have difficulty stocking enough plates to challenge his strength levels. Training alongside long-time training partners Jimmy Arnold and Sue Scheppele, Big Al spends as much time lugging around iron to load the bars and machines as he does lifting.

His preference for heavy training goes back to his intro into the weight world. As a high school wrestler, Fortney stumbled into a local bench press competition. At the meet, the young Fortney benched an impressive 365 at a 165-pound bodyweight, not even realizing the strength of which he was capable. Once he learned proper form, got the right lifting gear and added bodyweight he posted some even more impressive numbers — including a 545-pound bench press, 755-pound squat, and a 655-pound deadlift (all in the 220-pound class).

Since then, Fortney's gym lifts have easily eclipsed his early powerlifting efforts. For instance, he has bench pressed 600 pounds in the gym — without the benefit of a bench shirt. On the partial deadlift, he goes up to the mid-900s on the bar. Seated Dumbbell Shoulder Presses are performed with the 150s for reps. He routinely does Incline Dumbbell Presses with the 200-pounders for sets of ten and Bent Rows with 495. Obviously, his strength is proportionately strong in all basic movements.

Leg workouts generally take ninety minutes. "The goal when training legs," Big Al says, "is to make sure I can't walk correctly when I leave." Looking at the accompanying photos, it's obvious that his method for inducing quad devastation is impossibly heavy weights for basic exercises.

Fortney no longer feels the squat is necessary for his further development. "I build a lot of my size with squats," Big Al says, "but I find that machine movements allow me to direct the stress



SINGLE-LEGGED LEG EXTENSIONS

45-DEGREE LEG PRESS



Once all the hundred and forty-five-pound plates are loaded up, Big Al starts tossing people on the carriage.



Photos by Steve Colescott. Taken at The Training Center in Newcastle, Delaware.

BIG AL FORTNEY'S

PLATE-HOG
Leg Training

towards different sections of my legs while avoiding any thickening of my abs and midsection.”

Big Al attributes his injury-free career to careful form and a thorough warm-up. As part of this, he proceeds each leg training session with a ten-minute warm-up, usually walking on the treadmill. Following this, Big Al and his Delaware wrecking crew perform three sets of slow, strict single-leg **Leg Extensions**. The set/rep scheme here is 195x15, 225x12-15, and the entire stack (250 pounds) for ten to twelve reps. After this he is mentally and synovially prepared for the real fun to begin.

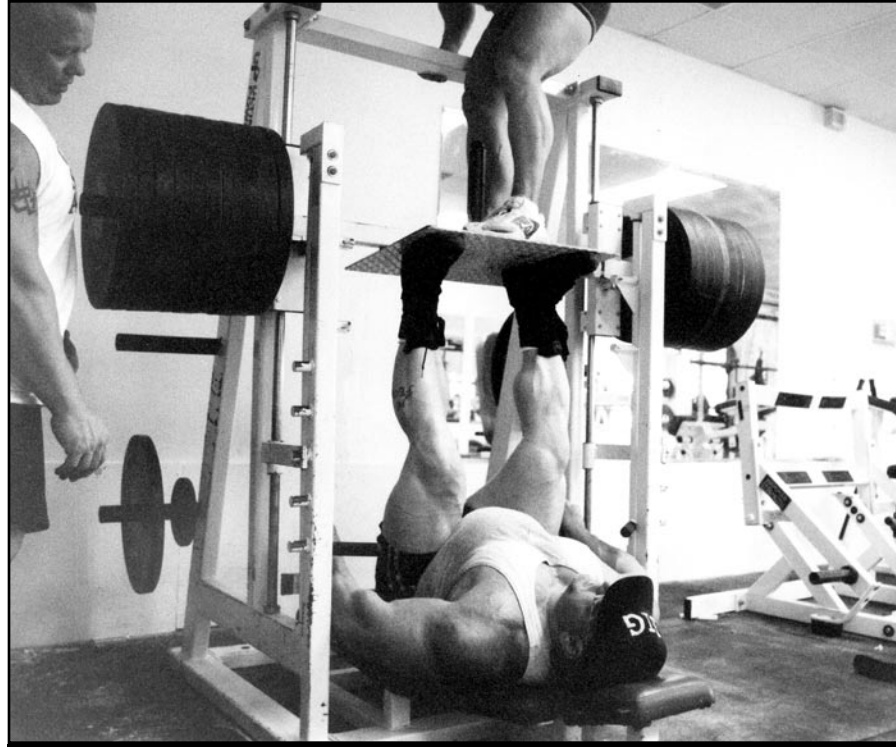
The key exercise of his program is the **45° Leg Press**. “I use really heavy weights to deeply fatigue my legs,” Fortney says. When Big Al says “heavy,” he is talking about enough iron to forge a small tank. His first set is a moderate (for Al) 1000-pounds for 15 reps. The other sets proceed at 1400x15, 1800x15, and 2200x10. At this point, plates are scarce so Big Al has to start adding people to the weight carriage (hopefully, they volunteer!). He normally goes up to about 2500 pounds for ten reps. Al places his feet high on the platform and close together, feeling that this, really brings out the outer sweep in his quads.

I was surprised to see Fortney use the **90° Leg Press** as his next exercise. “It hits a lot higher on my quads, which gives me the sweep all the way up to the upper quads, rather than just the teardrops above my knees,” Al says. Because he is already warmed-up from the previous exercise, Al can get into the serious weight right away. The rep/set scheme here is 600x12, 800x12, and 1000x10-12. If he still feels strong, he loads someone on top of the carriage for a final set.

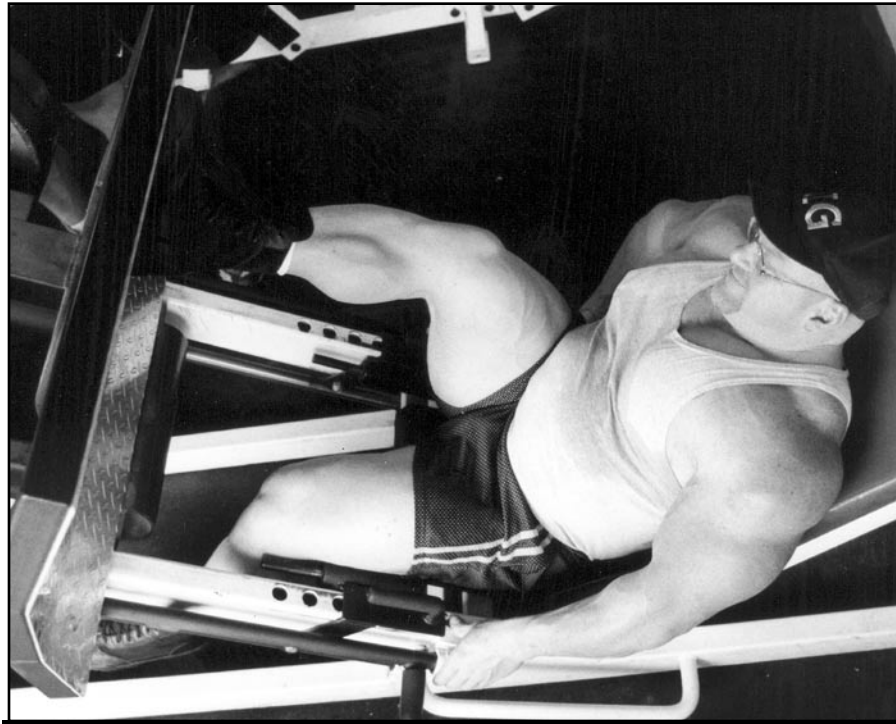
Fortney’s crew then moves on to **Smith Machine Squats**. Guess what? They do not use inhumanly huge poundages! Al focuses on directing stress to specific regions. “My feet are out about a foot in front of the bar,” Al says. “This keeps most of the tension on my quads and takes tension off of my waist and lower back.” For these Fortney uses three plates to a side, which is roughly 315 pounds (depending on the weight of the carriage and the counter-balance of the particular machine). He squats for three sets of about ten reps. For variety, they will sometimes substitute a Vertical Squat Machine which has a similar feel or do drop-sets of Leg Extensions.

Fortney’s preference for heavy weights extends into his hamstring training. “I try to go as heavy as possible,” he says, “and keep my reps in the 5-8 range. Too many people go for feel and pump at the expense of pushing their strength. We are walking on our legs all the time, which is basically like doing high reps with low resistance. They need heavy weight for low reps.”

Because hamstrings come into play during the basic exercises that make up Fortney’s leg workout, he feels very little hamstring warm-up is necessary.



90-DEGREE LEG PRESS



SINGLE-LEGGED LEG PRESS

He jumps into Stiff-Legged Deadlifts for 135x12, 225x10, 315x10. If his lower back is not too pumped, he will do 365x6-8. Big Al makes sure to keep his back arched, so that his ribcage is lifted up during the full range of motion. This keeps him from rolling his lower back. He keeps his knees straight and goes down for a full stretch, tensing his glutes and driving up with his hamstrings.

He finishes things off with Leg Curls. “I prefer plate-loaded leg curl machines,” Al says. “Otherwise, the weight stacks aren’t heavy enough so you end trying to attach weight to the stack, which is a pain in the ass.” We should all have such problems. He does this one leg at a time. The set/rep scheme here is 90x10, 135x10, and 180x8-10.

STIFF-LEGGED DEADLIFTS

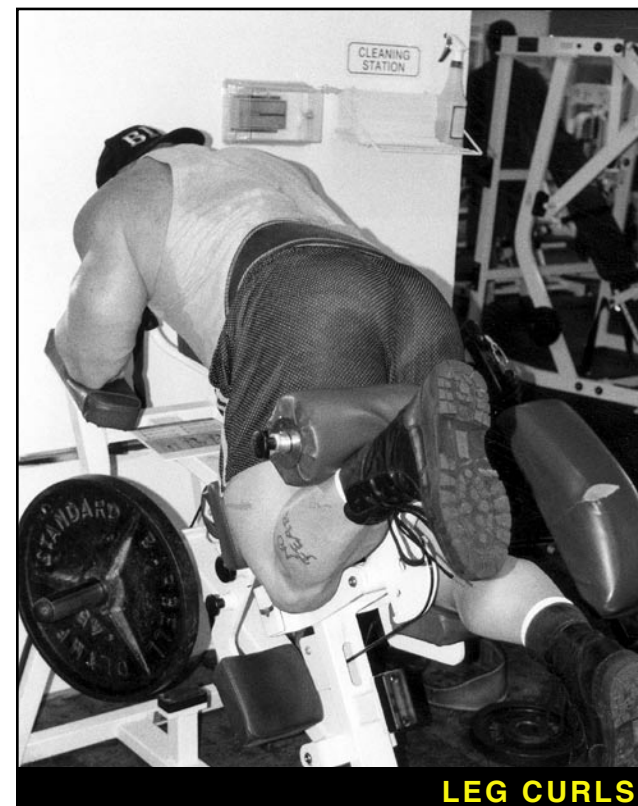


If Fortney feels that his hams still have some uncrushed fibers, he will finish with Lying Leg Curls. “By now, I need to lay down,” he admits. The set/rep scheme here is 150x10, 200x10, 250(stack)x8 or failure.

Their goal of complete leg devastation fully met, Big Al limps out of the gym, clutching an Eclipse Nutrition whey protein shake with one hand and steadying himself on anything within reach with the other. He is either assisted by, or following, the equally jelly-legged Jimmy and Sue. Their training finished, there are now more than ample plates freed up, allowing the other patrons to commence training.



- AL FORTNEY’S CLIMB TOWARDS A NATIONAL TITLE**
- 2002 NPC Nationals — 5th in the Super-Hvywt class
 - 2001 NPC Nationals — 9th in the Super-Hvywt class
 - 2000 NPC Nationals — 10th in the Heavywt class
 - 1999 NPC Nationals — 10th in the Heavywt class
 - 1998 Atlantic States — 2nd in the Light-Hvywt class



LEG CURLS

