

A black and white close-up photograph of a man's upper back and shoulders. The lighting highlights the well-defined trapezius muscles and the texture of the skin. The man is shirtless, and his right arm is bent, with his hand resting against his shoulder.

# BACK WORKOUT GUIDE

# MUSCLE & FITNESS

**YOU'LL NEVER BUILD A THICK,**  
strong back unless you create a foundation with basic, tried-and-true exercises. This routine combines four of the best. Use this for at least three months, once per week, before moving on to a more advanced programme.

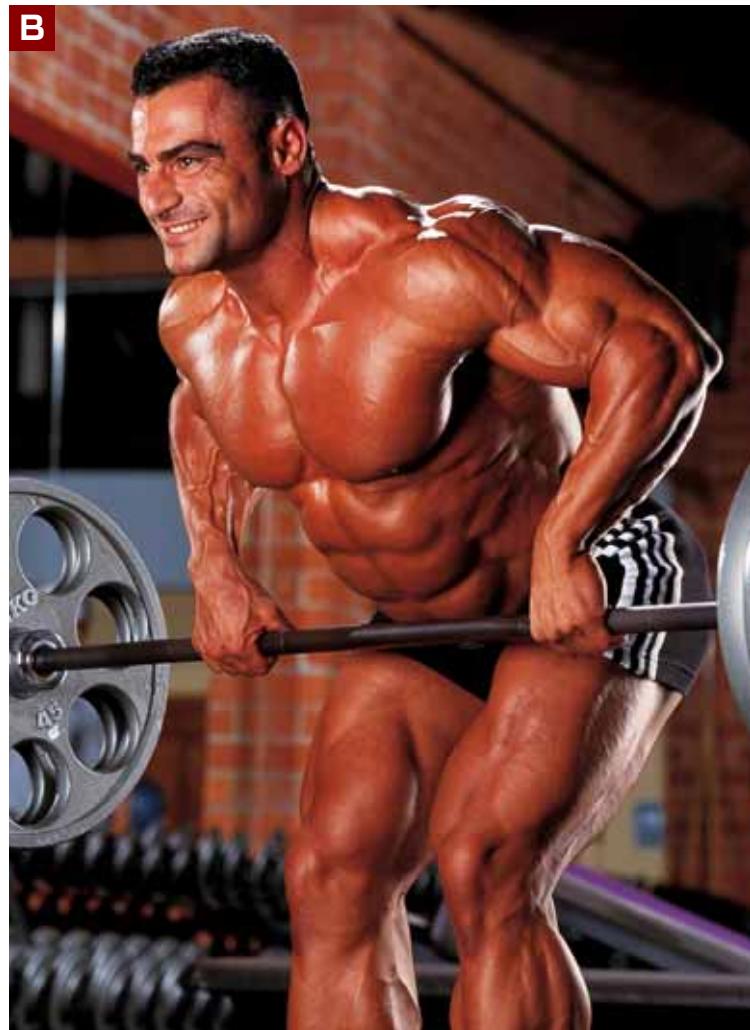
» For the bent-over row, start light and increase the weight slightly set-to-set.

» For the remaining three exercises, choose a weight with which you can get 12 reps, but is challenging enough that you couldn't get more than 2-3 reps beyond that if you continued the set.

## #27

### EXERCISE

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
<b>Bent-Over Barbell Row</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15, 12, 10</b>
<b>Wide-Grip Seated Cable Row</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>One-Arm Dumbbell Row</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Wide-Grip Pulldown To Front</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>12</b>



## BENT-OVER BARBELL ROW

**START:** Bend forward from the hips, keeping your torso just above parallel to the floor and your chest lifted to maintain the natural arch in your back. Take an overhand grip on the bar, hands just outside shoulder-width.

**MOVE:** Strongly pull the bar into your abs, contract your lats and middle-back muscles hard, then slowly lower the bar all the way down to full arm extension.

## WIDE-GRIP SEATED CABLE ROW

**START:** Sit at a row station and take a shoulder-width, palms-down grip on a straight bar. Bend your knees slightly and keep your back straight.

**MOVE:** Pull the bar all the way to your upper abs and squeeze your lats. Then slowly return the bar to the start, leaning forward just a bit to stretch your lats, but not so much that it causes you to round your lower back.



## WIDE-GRIP PULLDOWN TO FRONT

**START:** Take a wide grip on the bar and position yourself on the seat with your chest up. Lean back slightly.

**MOVE:** Squeeze your lats to initiate the movement, pulling the bar down in a smooth motion to nearly touch your upper chest. Hold the peak contraction for a moment, then slowly return the bar all the way up to get a good stretch through the working muscles. Don't rock back and forth as you rep – stay relatively upright throughout.



## ONE-ARM DUMBBELL ROW

**START:** Grasp a dumbbell in one hand and rest your free hand on a bench, keeping your chest slightly lifted as you bend forward from the hips, one foot just ahead of the other for balance.

**MOVE:** Keeping your torso stable throughout the movement, pull the dumbbell all the way up to touch your chest, moving your shoulder backward as your elbow comes toward the ceiling. Then lower the dumbbell straight down to the start position.

**CABLES GIVE THE BENEFIT OF**

speed — handles and weight selection are very easy to change — and provide continuous tension on your muscles.

►► The pulldown-to-front and standing pulldown compound set is configured to take advantage of the slightly easier second exercise. Once you tire on the seated pulldown, you put your body in a better leverage situation by standing, giving you the ability to power out some reps before your lats give out.

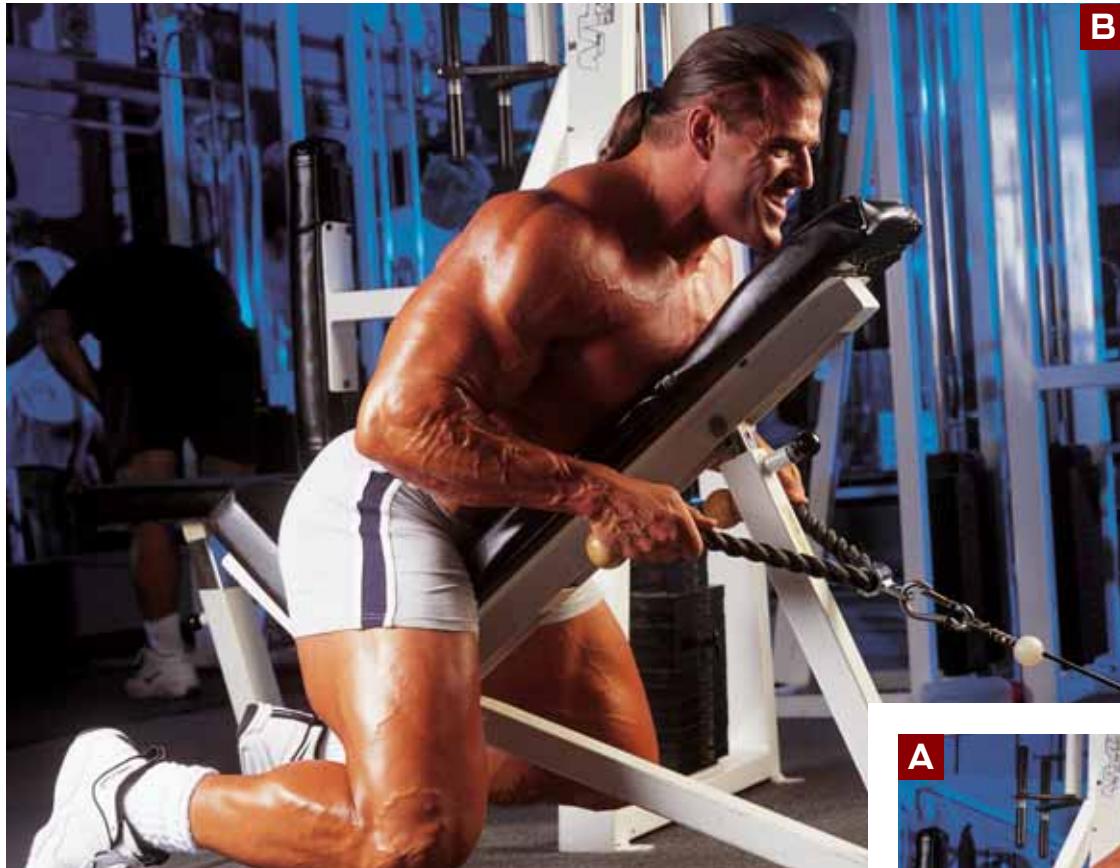
►► For the standing pulldown, if you have trouble getting to failure, try this trick — when you get to 12 reps, increase the weight and continue repping.

**#28****EXERCISE**

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
<b>Incline Cable Row</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Pulldown to Front*</b> (compound set with)	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Standing Pulldown</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>To failure</b>
<b>One-Arm Cable Row</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15**</b>

\* See exercise description on previous page.

\*\* Within each set, drop the weight 3 times; once after the first 5 reps, then again after 5 more, and one more time for the final 5 reps.

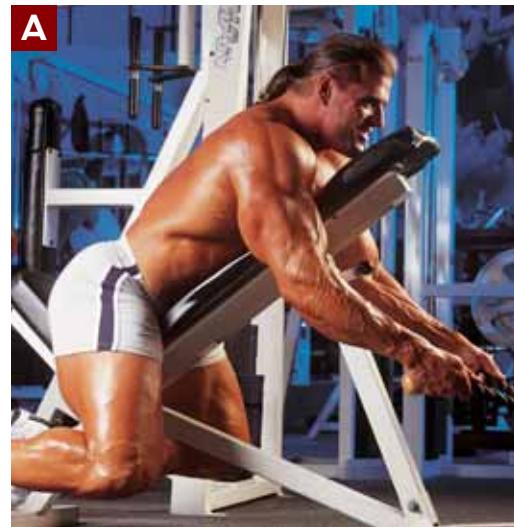


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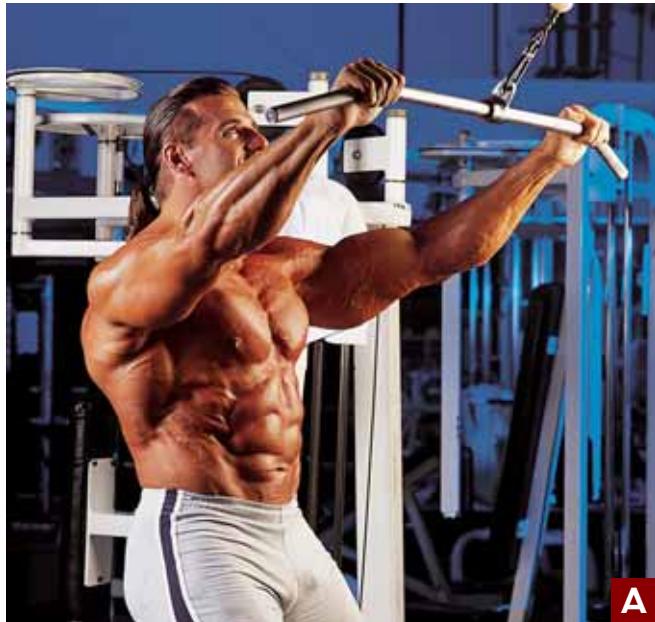
**INCLINE CABLE ROW**

**START:** Place an incline bench so that the higher end is near the low pulley. Set the angle at about 30–45 degrees. Grasp the rope attachment with both hands facing in and sit facing the weight stack, leaning forward against the angled bench. Keep your chest up with a slight arch in your back, and let the rope pull your shoulder blades forward into stretch.

**Move:** Pull on the rope, moving your elbows straight back. Pinch your shoulder blades together as your hands move out to your sides, contract your lats briefly at the end of the move, and return to the start.



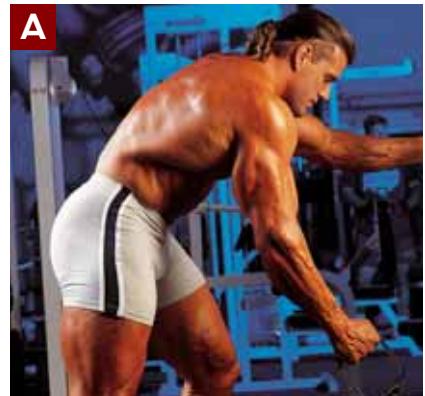
A



## STANDING PULLDOWN

**START:** Standing puts you in a stronger position, so you can continue lifting despite being fatigued from the seated pulldowns. Grasp a long pulldown handle about 4 inches wider than shoulder-width with an overhand grip. Bend your knees slightly, keep your back arched and chest up, and press your lower thighs, just above the knees, into the padded seat for stability.

**MOVE:** Lean back about 10 degrees and slowly pull the bar toward your mid-chest. As you reverse the movement, concentrate on making your back do the work. Stretch your lats at the top and pull again.



## ONE-ARM CABLE ROW

**START:** Grasp a D-handle on a low pulley with your palm facing your body. Grasp the support bar with your free hand to stabilise yourself and lean forward about 45 degrees. Use a split stance: the foot of the side you're working should be back while the other is forward. Keep your chest up, shoulders squared and a slight arch in your back.

**Move:** Pull the handle into the side of your waist until your elbow is past your body. When you return to the starting position, go for a deep stretch.

**BIG BACKS ARE BUILT WITH BIG**

rows. This routine includes three rowing variations, all designed to give you development from your mid-back out to your lats, providing ample width and depth in the process.

► If you don't have a pull-up bar at home, but you do most or all of your workouts there, consider installing one. No other bodyweight exercise is as valuable in a training regime than the pull-up. You can also use it during your arm workouts — a close, hammer-style (palms-facing) grip is a great move for your back and biceps.

#29

**EXERCISE**

<b>EXERCISE</b>	<b>SETS</b>	<b>REPS</b>
<b>Pull-Up*</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>One-Arm Dumbbell Row†</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>Palm-Rotation Row</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>Bent-Over Reverse-Grip Row</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>10, 8, 6</b>

\* If you have a pull-up bar at home; otherwise, go right to the second exercise. See exercise in **GARRETT'S** workout.

† Knee-on-bench variation.

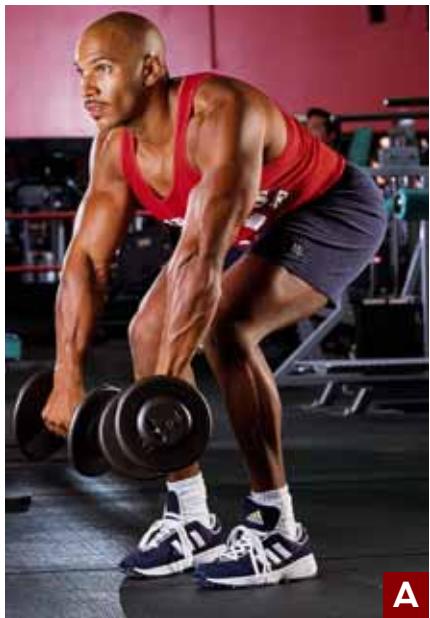
**ONE-ARM DUMBBELL ROW (KNEE ON BENCH)**

This move is the same as the one-arm row depicted in the **BEGINNER** section, but instead of keeping both feet planted on the floor, you'll place the knee opposite your working arm on a flat bench. You should try both styles to determine which feels most comfortable to you; both are equally effective at hitting the intended target.

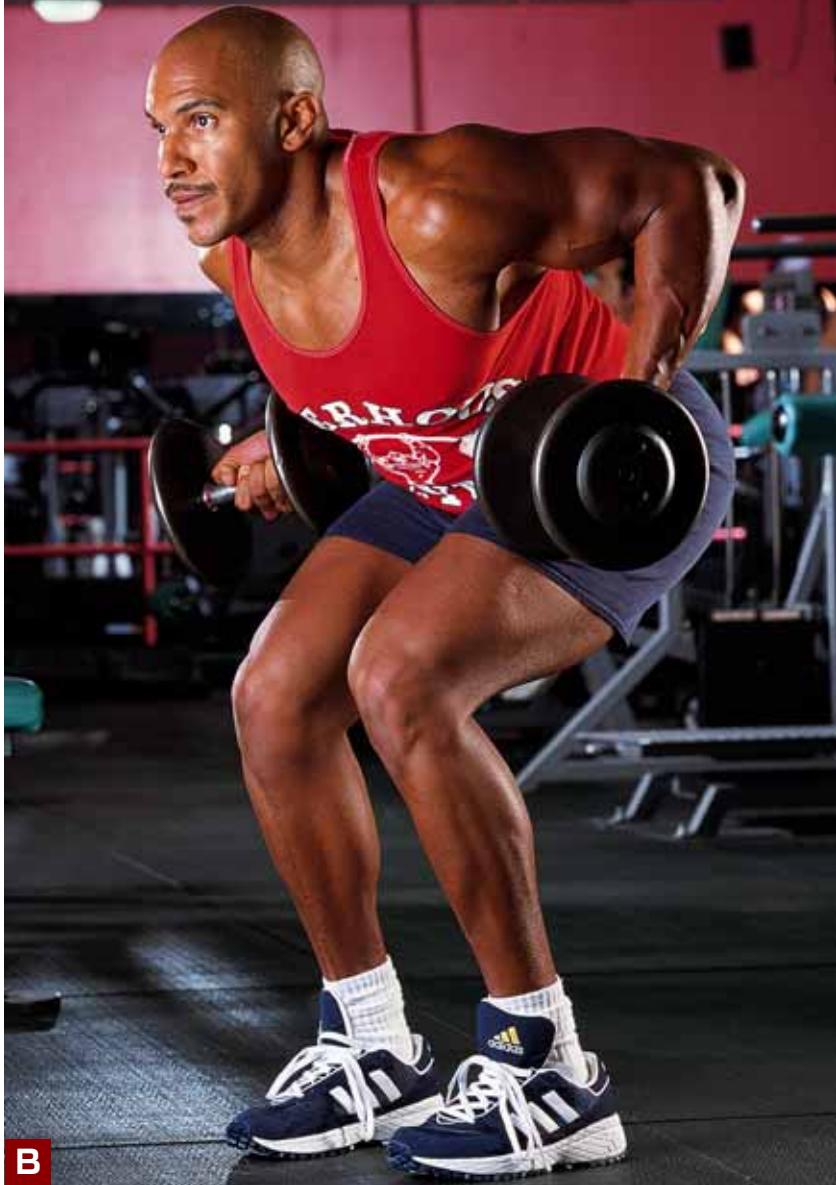
## PALM-ROTATION ROW

**START:** Grasp a dumbbell in each hand with an overhand grip and straighten your arms. Bend over and bend your knees, keeping the arch in your back tight and your chest out throughout the exercise.

**MOVE:** Lift the dumbbells to each side of your torso, twisting your palms as you go so your palms face forward at the top. Your elbows should be moving straight toward the ceiling as they bend. From the top, reverse the movement, twisting your hands into the palms-back position at the bottom.



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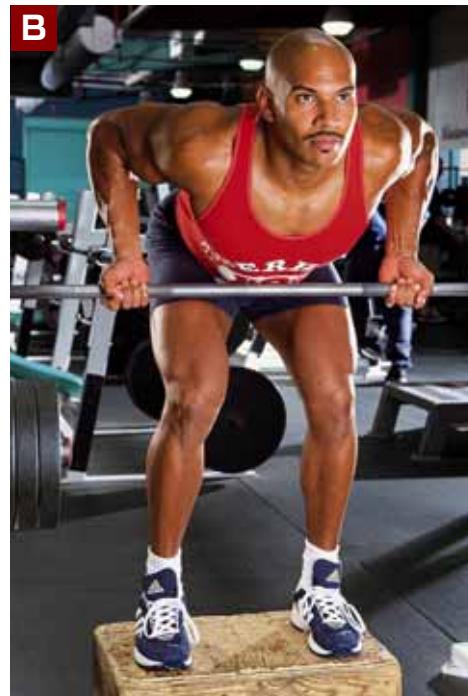


B

## BENT-OVER REVERSE-GRIP ROW

**START:** Bend at your hips and, keeping the arch solid in your lower back, grasp a barbell with a shoulder-width (or slightly wider) reverse grip.

**MOVE:** Bring the barbell straight up toward your abdomen, driving your elbows straight upward. Your shoulders should rotate slightly back on the ascent. Pause for a second at the top, squeezing your back muscles hard, then lower the bar back to the start. Don't let the bar touch down to the floor between reps. Although the athlete is shown here using a raised box, it's not necessary, as you can also easily do this exercise from the floor.



B

**HAWAIIAN MIKE DRAGNA DOESN'T**

take the laid-back, island-style approach to his back workout. This IFBB pro goes nose-to-the-grindstone with four moves designed to add slabs of thickness while carving in the topography-map detail coveted by bodybuilders (and anyone who wants a more impressive rear view).

**>>** "Concentration is key when training your back," Dragna states. "Always focus on your back muscles when pulling the weight instead of letting your arms do the work."

#30

**EXERCISE****Reverse-Grip Pulldown****SETS**

4\*

**REPS**12-15, 12-15,  
6-8, 6-8**T-Bar Row**

2

6-8

**Seated Cable Row**

2

6-8

**Hammer-Strength Row**

2\*\*

6-8

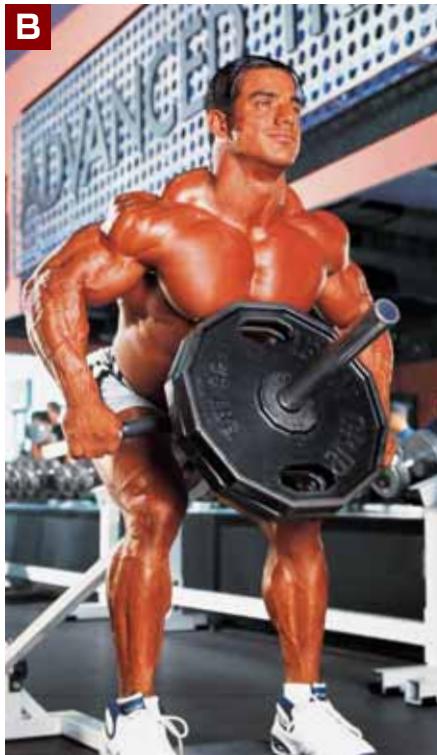
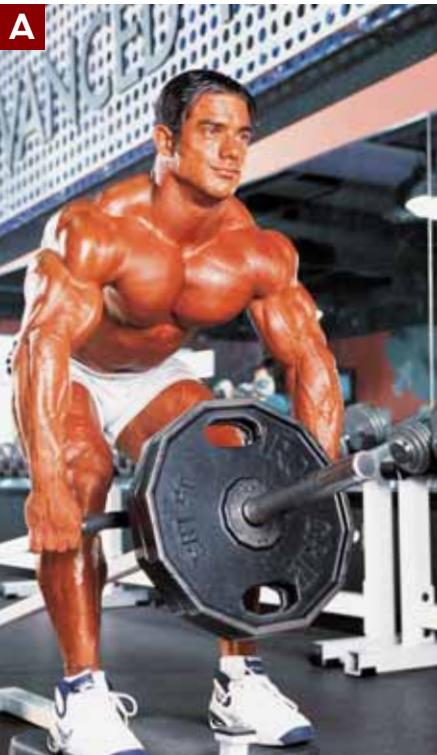
\* The first two sets are warm-ups.

\*\* Per side.

**REVERSE-GRIP PULLDOWN**

**START:** Place your legs snugly under the pads on a pull-down machine and position your hands approximately 8 inches apart on the bar, palms facing you.

**MOVE:** Keeping your torso perpendicular to the floor and your back slightly arched, slowly pull the bar downward, focusing on your back muscles the entire time, until the bar touches your chest. At this point, squeeze your shoulder blades together for maximal contraction. Return to the starting position, extending your arms completely at the end of each rep to achieve a full stretch.



To maintain his training momentum, Mike only rests 60 seconds between sets.

### T-BAR ROW

**START:** With your feet shoulder-width apart and your knees slightly bent, take a wide, overhand grip on the handles. Keep your back arched throughout the movement.

**MOVE:** Slowly move through a full range of motion, pulling all the way to your chest at the top and lowering to a full stretch at the bottom.

### SEATED CABLE ROW

**START:** Using a narrow-grip handle, keep your knees slightly bent with your feet flat on the platform in front of you for stabilisation.

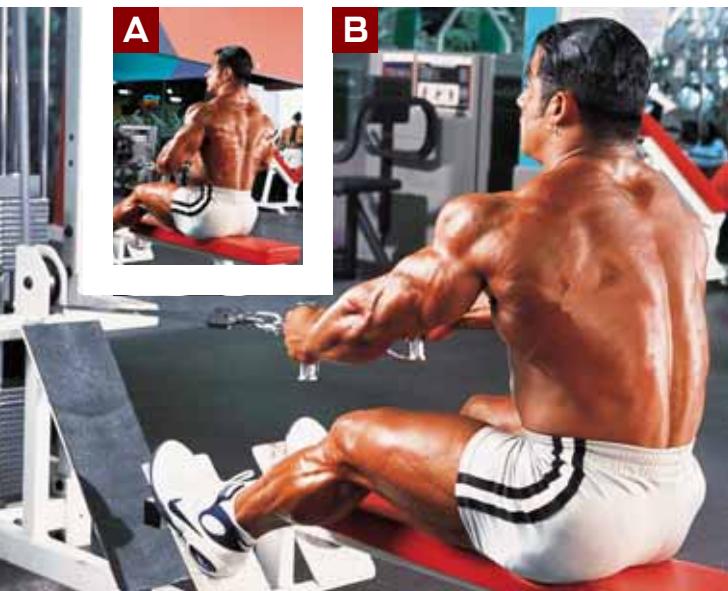
**MOVE:** With your torso perpendicular to the floor and your eyes straight ahead, pull the handle toward your midsection, again focusing on driving your elbows back until the handle touches your navel. After squeezing your shoulder blades together at the peak of contraction, slowly return to the starting position, leaning slightly forward with your arms extended at the end of each rep to stretch your lats completely.



### HAMMER-STRENGTH ROW

**START:** Adjust the seat so that your forearms are parallel to the floor and your chest touches the pad in front of you.

**MOVE:** Hold onto the grips with both hands while pulling with only one side. (Keeping hold with the opposite hand keeps your torso stable during the contraction.) Concentrate on the muscles of the middle back as you pull the handle toward your chest as far as possible without rotating your torso. Complete a full range of motion by slowly lowering the weight until your arm is fully extended. "You can either alternate arms every other rep or do each side separately," Mike suggests. "Try changing your routine by incorporating both."



**KNOWLEDGEABLE, PERSONABLE**

and — well, impressive from any angle, IFBB pro Garrett Downing knows what it takes to get the most out of his back workout. This back and trap combo programme is multi-faceted, leaving no corner of Garrett's back untouched.

► Garrett does his pull-ups "dead-hang" style, where he lets his arms go completely straight between reps. That way, he gets a complete range of motion. Cutting reps short on the pull-up by not coming all the way down makes it easier, but easier is definitely not better in this case.

► "Always hit a different area of your back by alternating exercise choices and order," Garrett says.

**PULL-UP**

**START:** "First, I usually use straps [not shown] to reinforce my grip, because although I'm strong enough to hold myself, my grip just goes," Garrett says. "I hang from the bar with a slightly wider than shoulder-width grip."

**MOVE:** With a slight arch in your lower back, pull yourself up without using any extra body momentum, then lower yourself back to the start. "At the top, I like to barely touch my chest to the bar, which helps to ensure I go through a full range of motion," Garrett adds.

## #31

## EXERCISE

	SETS	REPS
<b>Pull-Up</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>T-Bar Row*</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8-10</b>
<b>Seated Cable Row*</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>Hammer-Strength Row Machine*</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>8-10</b>
<b>Close-Grip Pulldown</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10-12</b>
<b>Pulldown to Front**</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12-16</b>
<b>Dumbbell Shrug</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10-12</b>

\*See exercise descriptions in **MIKE'S** workout.

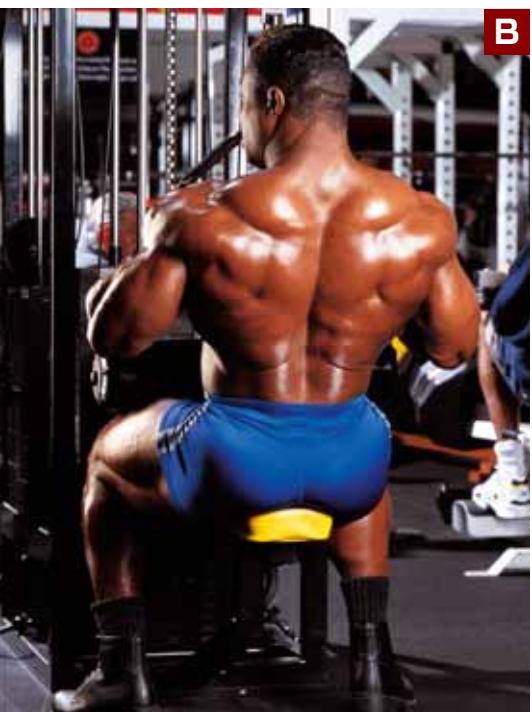
\*\*See exercise description on **BEGINNER'S** page.



## CLOSE-GRIP PULLDOWN

**START:** Attach a hammer-style bar to a pulldown station and sit in the seat, grasping the handles so your palms face each other.

**MOVE:** "I smoothly pull the weight down to my chest, keeping my back arched a little bit to make sure all the emphasis is on my lower lats," Garrett says. "With this movement, like most back exercises, it's not really about the weight but more about getting your form down, and squeezing and contracting. I just rely on good technique and squeeze through the entire movement."



## DUMBBELL SHRUG

**START:** Garrett finishes off his back with trapezius work. "Shrugs are always last; if I did them in the beginning, it would adversely affect the rest of my strength movements," he explains. Grasp two heavy dumbbells and stand in a comfortable, shoulder-width stance.

**MOVE:** "I hold the dumbbells at my sides, and let them extend as far downward as I comfortably can," he says. "I'll let them drop down to my thighs, then I'll pull my shoulders straight up toward my ears and hold for a two-count before slowly lowering the weights."

**SIX-TIME MR. OLYMPIA DORIAN**

Yates was nicknamed The Shadow. Could it be because his billowing lats cast darkness for miles whenever the mighty Brit walked onto a bodybuilding stage? This is the back workout Yates used in preparation for his final Olympia win in 1997.

► “I train my back separately — never with other bodyparts,” Yates says.

“When you work out with really heavy weights and out-of-this-world intensity, doubling up bodyparts is impossible.”

► “If you can’t pause with a weight in the fully-contracted position, you’re going too heavy,” Dorian says. “Don’t let momentum be the force that moves your weights; be a master of form.”

**#32****EXERCISE**

	<b>SETS</b>	<b>REPS</b>
<b>Machine Pullover</b>	1*	<b>6-8</b>
<b>Reverse-Grip Pulldown</b>	1**	<b>6-8</b>
<b>Bent-Over Barbell Row</b>	1**	<b>6-8</b>
<b>One-Arm Machine Row</b>	1	<b>6-8</b>
<b>Seated Cable Row</b>	1	<b>6-8</b>
<b>Weighted Back Extension†</b>	1**	<b>8-12</b>
<b>Deadlift</b>	1**	<b>6-8</b>

\* Also do 2 warm-up sets. \*\* Also do 1 warm-up set. † This move is like the extension in **UPPER BODY** section, except you hold a weight plate to your chest during the exercise. See the machine pullover in **CHEST** section; the bent-over row in **BEGINNER** section; and the deadlift in **LEGS** section.

**REVERSE-GRIP MACHINE PULLDOWN**

**START:** Dorian uses a Hammer-Strength machine for this move. Set yourself firmly in the machine, set the pads onto your knees and take a reverse grip on the handles.

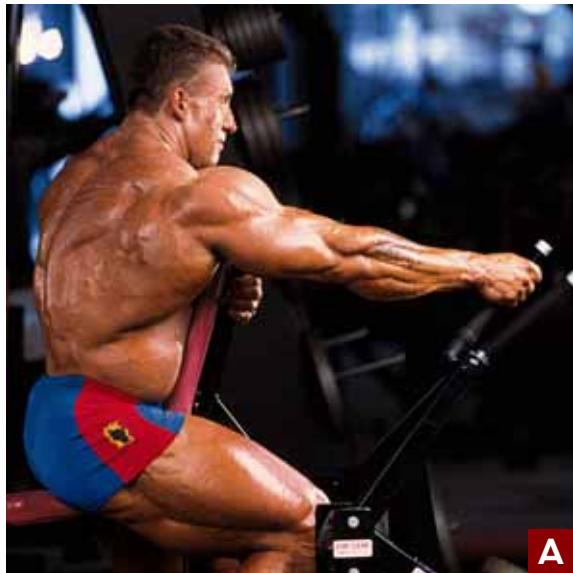
**MOVE:** Pull the handles down toward your chest, using a moderate rate of speed to minimise cheating, ensuring that your lats bear the brunt at every point during the movement. Contract your lats at the bottom, and control the weight during its ascent to the top position. Don’t let the weight touch down between reps, to keep the tension on throughout the exercise.





## WIDE-GRIP SEATED CABLE ROW

**START:** For full description in **BACK** section.



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B



C



## BENT-OVER BARBELL ROW

**START:** For full description in **BACK** section.

## ONE-ARM MACHINE ROW

**START:** Dorian includes this exercise in his back arsenal because it enables him to work one side at a time, allowing for a fuller range of movement over free-weight rows. Sit with your upper body against the pad and grasp one handle.

**MOVE:** Pull the weight back without twisting your torso until your elbow is as far back as possible and you feel your lat under maximum stress. Release the weight slowly to complete the rep.

CHRIS LUND

# BACK

## SPECIALISED ROUTINES

### MORE WORKOUTS TO TRY:

**#33)** This routine can be paired with #34; rotate between the two every other back workout for a balanced attack.

**#34)** This or workout #33 can also be used in conjunction with a regular mass or strength-building back workout, if either your lats or your back thickness is lacking (do the appropriate workout on a different day during the week from your regular back-training session).

**#35)** Don't miss a back workout because you're short on time. This fast-paced circuit can be done in 15 minutes.

**#36)** Craft peaks, valleys and striations with this high-rep workout.

**#37)** Increase your strength levels with this programme, built around one of the best all-around exercises ever created, the barbell deadlift. Work your way down to singles (a one-rep set) on this lift, pyramiding up the weight for each set. Strive for incremental strength increases workout-to-workout.

**#38)** If your back is a stubborn muscle group for you, give it some shock therapy in the form of this routine. It hits your back from numerous angles, and brings on the muscle failure via a killer compound, drop set combination.

**#39)** With this carefully blended workout, you can build a solid foundation of muscle mass.

## #33 MAXIMUM WIDTH

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Pull-Up	4	12, 10, 8, 8
Standing Pulldown	4	10-12
Wide-Grip Seated Cable Row	4	10-12
Straight-Arm Pulldown*	3	10-12

\* Like the pressdown in **TRICEPS** section, except you keep your arms straight throughout instead of bending your elbows.

## #34 MAXIMUM THICKNESS

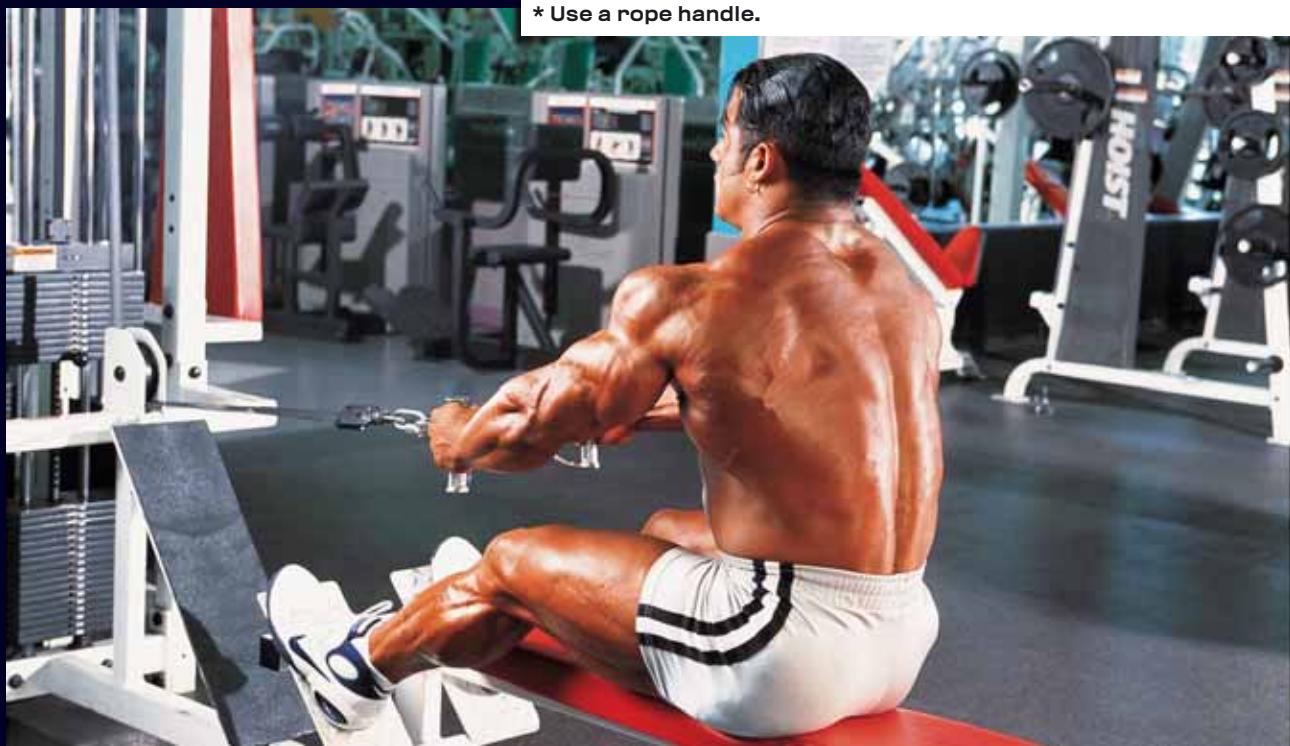
EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Close-Grip Pulldown	4	12, 10, 8, 8
One-Arm Dumbbell Row	4	10, 10, 8, 8
Seated Cable Row	4	10-12
Back Extension*	3	12-15

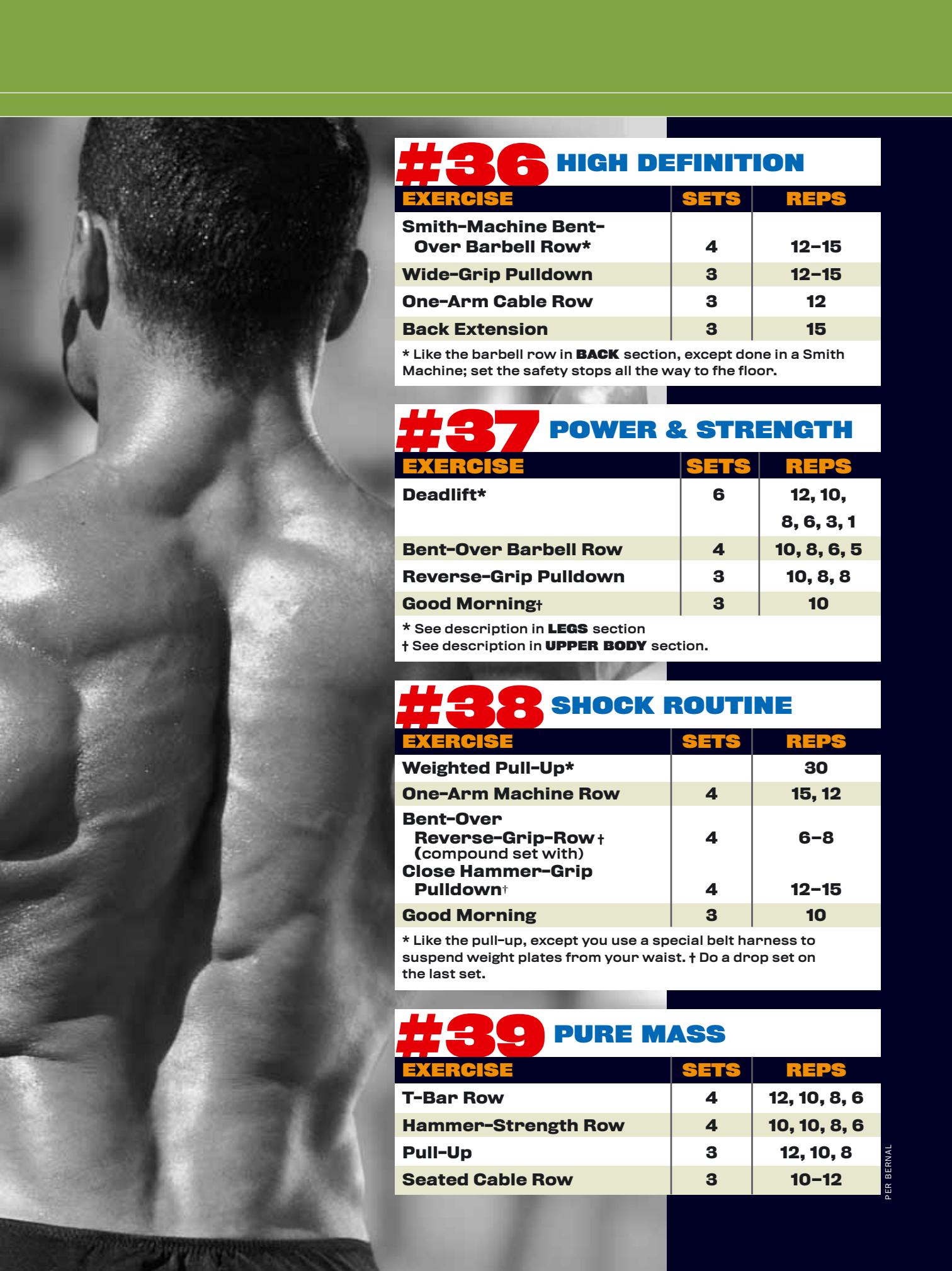
\* See description in **FULL BODY** section.

## #35 FOUR-MOVE CIRCUIT

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Palm-Rotation Dumbbell Row	4	12, 12, 10, 8
Seated Cable Row*	4	12, 12, 10, 8
Wide-Grip Pulldown	4	12, 12, 10, 8
Reverse-Grip Pulldown	4	12, 12, 10, 8

\* Use a rope handle.





## #36 HIGH DEFINITION

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Smith-Machine Bent-Over Barbell Row*	4	12-15
Wide-Grip Pulldown	3	12-15
One-Arm Cable Row	3	12
Back Extension	3	15

\* Like the barbell row in **BACK** section, except done in a Smith Machine; set the safety stops all the way to the floor.

## #37 POWER & STRENGTH

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Deadlift*	6	12, 10, 8, 6, 3, 1
Bent-Over Barbell Row	4	10, 8, 6, 5
Reverse-Grip Pulldown	3	10, 8, 8
Good Morning†	3	10

\* See description in **LEGS** section

† See description in **UPPER BODY** section.

## #38 SHOCK ROUTINE

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
Weighted Pull-Up*		30
One-Arm Machine Row	4	15, 12
Bent-Over Reverse-Grip-Row† (compound set with) Close Hammer-Grip Pulldown†	4	6-8
Good Morning	3	12-15

\* Like the pull-up, except you use a special belt harness to suspend weight plates from your waist. † Do a drop set on the last set.

## #39 PURE MASS

EXERCISE	SETS	REPS
T-Bar Row	4	12, 10, 8, 6
Hammer-Strength Row	4	10, 10, 8, 6
Pull-Up	3	12, 10, 8
Seated Cable Row	3	10-12