

FORGED ABROAD · GUIDE NO. 02

THE STRENGTH TEST

you can do without the machine

How to work out what you should actually be lifting.
One session, a notebook, twenty minutes.

FORGED ABROAD

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61 & 30. He'd never trained till June.

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A machine did it for me first

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WHAT YOU'LL WALK OUT WITH

One number, measured rather than guessed — and a percentage to take off it for whatever you're training for.

Twenty minutes. A normal gym. A piece of paper. No machine required, though this one is what started it off.

FIRST — WHERE THIS CAME FROM

01

THE IDEA

Why this exists

I trained on a machine recently that ran three tests on me before it let me lift anything. **No pins, no plates.** It worked out what I could handle and set itself from there.

Clever bit of kit, and most gyms haven't got one. The thing it does isn't complicated though. It measures one number, then works everything else backwards from it.

You can get that same number in about twenty minutes, with a normal gym and a piece of paper. That's the whole of this guide.



The machine, mid-test — third of three, and it has already worked out 107kg for me before I've chosen anything.

02

THE PROBLEM

Most people pick their weight by feel

You started on 40kg because it felt about right. Eighteen months later you're still on 40kg, because it still feels about right, and it always will.

That's what feel does. It settles on comfortable and stays there. Then you wonder why nothing's changed.

The fix isn't training harder. It's knowing your actual number, then working from it deliberately instead of guessing every session.

WHAT WE'RE MEASURING

Your estimated one rep max

The heaviest you could lift once, for a single rep, on a given exercise.

READ THIS TWICE

You are not going to attempt it. Testing a true one rep max is how people get hurt, and you don't need to. There's a formula that gets you within a few percent from a much safer set.

Once you've got that number, every weight you use for the next few months comes out of it instead of out of thin air.

03
SETUP

Before you start

Five things. Get them wrong and the number you walk out with isn't yours.

Do it on a normal training day

Not a tired one. Not after nights, not on four hours' sleep, not the day after legs.

Warm up properly

Five minutes of something easy, then two light sets of the exercise you're testing.

Test one or two lifts, not six

Fatigue ruins the numbers. Pick the ones that matter to you.

Have a spotter

Or use a machine for anything where being stuck under the bar is possible.

Stop if your form breaks

A number you got with a rounded back isn't your number. It's an injury with a decimal point.

NEXT — THE TEST ITSELF, ONE SET AND TWENTY MINUTES

04
THE TEST

One set. Two numbers.

That's the whole test. Do it once, write two things down, and the maths on the next page turns them into your number.

1. Pick a weight you think you could manage for about eight reps.
   A guess is fine here. The maths corrects for it.

2. Do as many clean reps as you can — but stop with one or two good reps left in you.
   Not to failure. When the bar slows down noticeably, you're there.

3. Write down two things: the weight, and the number of reps.
   That's it. That's the test.

IF THE SET DIDN'T LAND IN RANGE

< 4 reps	Too heavy. Rest five minutes, drop 20%, go again.
> 12 reps	Too light. Rest five minutes, add 20%, go again.
4 – 12	Anything in here gives you a usable number.

NEXT — TURNING THOSE TWO NUMBERS INTO YOUR MAX

05
THE MATHS

The maths, done for you

Find your rep count. Multiply your weight by the number underneath it.

4 REPS	5 REPS	6 REPS
× 1.09	× 1.13	× 1.16
7 REPS	**8 REPS**	**9 REPS**
× 1.20	× 1.24	× 1.29
10 REPS	11 REPS	12 REPS
× 1.33	× 1.39	× 1.44

WORKED EXAMPLE

You pressed 60kg for 8 clean reps with a couple left in the tank.

60 × 1.24 = **74kg** estimated one rep max. That's your number.

06

THE PAYOFF

Now every weight comes out of it

Instead of out of thin air. Pick what you're training for, take that percentage of your number, and round to whatever the gym actually has.

STRENGTH	MUSCLE	ENDURANCE
85–90%	**65–75%**	**50–60%**
of your max	*of your max*	*of your max*
3 – 5 reps	8 – 12 reps	15+ reps
63 – 67kg	48 – 56kg	37 – 44kg

Bottom row: what that means on the 74kg example.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Notice what that does. If you'd been sat on 40kg for eighteen months thinking you were building muscle, you were about **8kg light** — and wondering why nothing moved.

07

THE HABIT

The bit most people skip

Retest in eight weeks. Put the date in your phone now.

That's the whole point. The number isn't a badge, it's a baseline. If it hasn't moved in eight weeks, something in your training needs to change — and now you'll actually know rather than suspecting.

The machine does this automatically. You're doing it manually. *Same information.*

THE THREE-LINE VERSION

1. Find a weight you can do 4–12 clean reps with, stopping 1–2 short of failure.
2. Multiply by the number in the table.
3. Take 65–75% of that for normal training.

Twenty minutes, once every eight weeks, and you stop guessing.

> ONE HONEST NOTE
>
> This is an estimate, not a lab test. It'll be within a few percent, which is more than accurate enough to train off. It's written for healthy adults who already train. If you're coming back from an injury, pregnant, or you've got a heart condition or high blood pressure, get it checked before you go near a heavy set. That's not a legal line, it's just sensible.

FORGED ABROAD
EUROPE

WHO WROTE THIS

I'm Ollie.

I train with my dad, who's 61 and started in June having never trained before. We post the numbers every week, including the bad ones.

This guide came out of a machine at the gym doing something clever, and me wanting to know whether you actually needed the machine. You don't.

Do the test. Send me the number.
I'll tell you what I'd train off it.