

Great Guns in 12 Weeks - Phase 1

by Ian King | Fri, Jun 02, 2000

Great Guns in Twelve Weeks, Phase I Weeks 1-3 by Ian King Chances are, if a beautiful blonde were to walk up ...

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Chances are, if a beautiful blonde were to walk up to you, twirl her finger through her hair, and ask you to show her your big 'ole muscles, you wouldn't turn around and flex your calf in her direction while pointing out the unquestionable buffness of your soleus. Of course not, instead you'd roll up your shirt sleeves and fill her baby blues with the site of your bulging biceps. Undoubtedly, her mouth (and later her panties) would drop at the site of those .50-caliber guns.

What's that? You say your guns are more like those Red Ryder BB rifles we all had as kids? Well then, it's a good thing Ian King is back with another of his legendary 12-week programs, this one an arm-specialization routine designed help you build a hefty pair of .44 magnums that even Dirty Harry would envy.

The first 12-week program I presented covered the muscle group that's probably trained the least in most gyms — the **legs**. The next program focused on the **chest and back**, which was heading in the direction of greater popularity. Now the trend has continued, and I think I've struck gold this time. Get ready, it's time to take on guns!

As I wrote in the chest and back articles, I don't encourage you to use this program too often as it's intentionally unbalanced. Use it for the prescribed 12 weeks and then jump onto another program. What about the rest of the body? I'm leaving you to do "maintenance" on the rest of your body on your other training days, be that one or two other days in the week.

If the arms are to be truly prioritized, you must be prepared to ensure your volume for the remainder of the body doesn't exceed the volume used for your guns. You can do this by simply adding up the number of sets in the following program and not exceeding it in the maintenance days where you'll be training the rest of the body. For most of you, I suggest no more than two other maintenance days. Don't worry about getting weaker in the chest, shoulder, and back lifts. When you have finished the "Great Guns" program you'll appreciate the impact of improved strength in your elbow flexors and extensors!

If you stick with this program for the full 12 weeks (and I suggest only those who want to prioritize their arms do so), you'll be impressed and satisfied by what you achieve. In fact, I expect you'll see the greatest arm improvement you've ever had! Don't take my word for it, though. Do a "before and after" measure of the lower and upper arm. Chances are that you'll see a significant difference in you "after" measurements. By the end of the 12 weeks, you may not have Charles Poliquin guns, but you will be blocking some serious sunlight when you point directions to someone on the beach!

There are four phases. I recommend you stay on each phase for three weeks. (Note that some may choose to stay on each phase for only two weeks if they feel a particular phase is beginning to lose its effectiveness. Others may choose to make each phase last four weeks, making this a 16-week program. It's up to you, but three weeks is about right for the average trainee, and I'll be using that assumption for the remainder of this program to simplify things.) Also remember to incorporate my usual load selection recommendations. Start out light enough in the first week to see load increases each subsequent week. Avoid going to total muscle failure in all but the last week on this phase.

The program used in Phase I uses a lot of different exercises with lots of supersets and higher reps. As you'll find out, each phase is significantly different, so don't expect that what you're doing in this first phase is what you'll be doing for the full 12 weeks. In fact, if you don't like to do a range of exercises and methods, many of which you haven't done or don't normally do, maybe this program isn't for you. As with all my programs, I encourage you to break out of some limiting habits you may have and experience things done differently!

Enough talk, let's head to the gym!

Phase I (Weeks 1-3)

Workout A

Remember my two favorite training themes: humility and soreness. Learn the former and expect the latter and you'll soon be stretching the sleeves of your *Testosterone* T-shirt. Go light in your first week and concentrate on feeling your way through. You'll be surprised how little load you'll need in this phase if you follow my instructions on rest and tempo. Here we go!

Warm-up: Perform 10 minutes of light aerobics (optional) and 15 minutes of upper body stretching (compulsory).

Forearm flexions with bar: Snatch a bar away from the biggest guy in the gym and kneel down in front of a bench. With your wrists supported on the bench and your hands hanging just off the side, curl the bar toward you with palms up. Allow the bar to roll to your fingertips.



Forearm extensions with bar: Also called reverse wrist curls, this is the same basic movement but with the palms facing down.



Note that the extensions will probably require a lighter load. If you feel too much strain on your wrists, try using the EZ-curl bar. If the lightest bar in the gym causes you fatigue in the warm-up set, just call it your work set and move on to the next exercise. Use a full range, and terminate the reps if range is lost.

For the following biceps tri-set, you'll be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises. Always begin with your weak-side arm.

1) Concentration dumbbell curls: Sit on the end of a prone bench with a dumbbell between your legs. If the dumbbell gets upset, tell her to get her ass back behind the front desk and continue to smack her gum. If you must, use the other type of dumbbell made of iron.



Bend over from the waist and push your elbow into the inner thigh. Keep the elbow outside the vertical line of the shoulder and keep it still. This is a critical point if you want to overload the elbow flexors at a joint angle that few exercises offer. Rest no more than ten seconds and move to the next exercise (using the same arm).

2) Low pulley biceps curls: Stand in front of the low pulley with the pulley lining up with the arm and shoulder. Keep the arm by the side throughout, and keep the wrist straight. Stop the flexion before the elbow wants to leave the side of the body. Again, with the same arm and with no more than ten seconds rest, go to the next movement.



3) Single-arm Zottman curls on preacher bench: Take a dumbbell and ensure your whole upper arm is in contact with the bench. The top of the bench should be in your armpit. Lower the dumbbell down with a semi-pronated grip (palm facing down but with the thumb higher than the little finger).



At the end of the lowering, rotate the palm so that it's facing upward, then lift. At the top of the lift, rotate the palm back to the semi-prone position. Note that if you go too far into pronation you will be so weak that your load ability will limit the overload in the concentric phase.



Now you can go back and do the other arm (the strong side arm). Use the same weight and do the same number of reps as you did on the weak side.

For the following triceps tri-set, you'll be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises. Always begin with your weak-side arm.

1) Dumbbell triceps kickbacks: This exercise is to be done seated, one arm at a time. Now, this movement cops more flak than Bill Phillips because it's considered to be too "foo foo". However, because this is an arm specialization program, I want to prescribe a wide range of movements in the hypertrophy phases. Kickbacks also serve as an excellent pre-fatigue exercise. Because many of you have thrown it out since hearing how "useless" it is, it'll also have that "unfamiliar exercise" effect!



Keep the elbow above the shoulder and *still!* Hold the end of extension for a full two seconds. When you lower the dumbbell down, don't allow the lower arm to go beyond the vertical line and into active flexion. In other word, at the bottom of the movement, the forearm should be pointed straight down. With no more than ten seconds rest and using the same-side arm, go to the next exercise.

2) Single dumbbell lying triceps extensions: Lay on your back on the bench with one arm straight up in the air holding the dumbbell. Allow the dumbbell to be lowered to the opposite

shoulder, going across the chest. Keep the working arm elbow high and still. Again, with the same arm and with no more than ten seconds rest, go to the next movement.

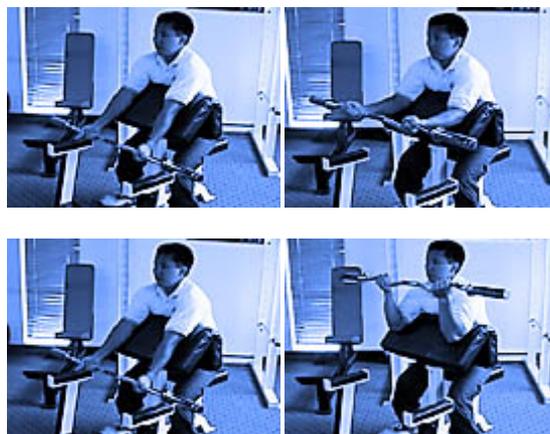


3) Single dumbbell overhead triceps extensions: This is to be done seated, keeping the elbow as high and as far back as possible at all times (to maximize the stretch on the triceps) and keep the elbow to the ear. Use a range that results in the dumbbell touching the upper back.



Now you can go back and do the other, stronger arm. Remember, use the same weight and do the same number of reps as you did on the weak side. This completes the triceps tri-set, so get a drink of water, scope the thong queen over on the hamstring curl machine and prepare yourself for what's coming up next. You're gonna need it!

Biceps curls on a preacher bench: With the preacher bench at about 45 degrees, take a medium grip on an EZ-curl bar and set your arms and body up as per the description for Zottman curls above. The bar should go all the way down until your arms are fully extended, but the concentric range will be limited to stopping just before the vertical gravity line (that's just before you feel the tension come off the biceps.) The speed of movement will be 311, but I want to use a variation of the old "21s" on this exercise.





Start with seven reps of the bottom half (the harder half) of the movement, then do seven full-range reps, and then do seven reps at the top half (the easier half). Remember to pause each time before changing direction. The weight stays the same the whole time, but if you're doing it too easy (not an issue in the first week) a spotter can add resistance in the eccentric or concentric phases.

Close-grip bench presses on a slight incline: Set an incline bench up with about a 10-20 degree incline. Take a grip on the bar with hands about six to eight inches apart. If you need to, allow your hands to rotate such that the thumbs come out from under the bar and wrap around the top. (This isn't a technique I use in conventional benching, but do offer as an alternative when the wrist is rotated to extreme ranges such as in the wide or close grip bench.)



Use the 21s method described above, with seven reps at the half closest to the chest first, seven full-range reps, and then seven reps at the half further from the body.

Very wide-grip EZ-bar biceps curls: Take as wide a grip as is comfortable on the EZ-curl bar and perform a standing biceps curl with an underhand grip (palms facing up). Work with a weight that causes fatigue around ten reps (it doesn't have to be exactly ten, but ideally within two reps either way). Then lighten the weight immediately and go again for another ten reps. Once again lighten the load for a third and final set. If you need to take up to ten seconds rest between sets within the strip set this is okay, but ideally in this first phase you should minimize the rest.



You'll end up performing three of these strip sets which will be superseded with overhead triceps extension as described below.

Overhead EZ-bar triceps extensions: Take a medium grip on the EZ-curl bar and raise it above your head. You may choose to rest your bum up against an appropriate height support such as the preacher bench. Keeping the elbows high, still, and ideally equal distance apart throughout the lift, use the fullest range available without any elbow movement.



In the work set, use the same strip set method as described above. Warm up with a light ten reps if you feel you need to and remember to alternate as a superset with the previous biceps exercise.

Here's a summary of the first upper body workout outlined in Phase I:

Forearm flexions with bar

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Kneel on ground, palms up, forearms supported on bench, using bar	20 reps	20 reps	311	None, superset with forearm extensions

Forearm extensions with bar

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Kneel on ground, palms down, forearms supported on bench, using bar	20 reps	20 reps	311	None, superset with forearm flexions

Biceps tri-set

1) Concentration dumbbell curls

Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422 None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

2) Low pulley biceps curls

Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422 None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

3) Single-arm Zottman curls on a preacher bench

Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422 None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

Triceps tri-set

1) Dumbbell triceps kickbacks

Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422 None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

2) Single dumbbell lying triceps extensions

Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422 None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

3) Overhead dumbbell triceps extensions, seated

Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422 None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

Biceps curls on a preacher bench

Position	Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
Underhand medium grip, preacher bench set at 45 degrees	10 reps at normal range and speed	21s	311 Just enough to set up the next exercise

Close-grip bench presses on a slight incline

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Hands 6-8 inches apart, incline bench at 10-20 degrees	10 reps at normal range and speed	21s	311	Just enough to set up the next exercise

Very wide-grip standing EZ-bar biceps curls

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Supine grip, wide as grip as is comfortable	10 reps at normal range and speed	3 strip sets of about 10 reps each as outlined in text	311	Superset with overhead bar triceps extensions

Overhead EZ-bar triceps extensions

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Supine, medium grip, standing	10 reps at normal range and speed	3 strip sets of about 10 reps each as outlined in text	311	Superset with very wide-grip standing EZ-bar biceps curls

Phase I (Weeks 1-3)

Workout B

Warm-up: Perform 10 minutes of light aerobics (optional) and 15 minutes of upper body stretching (compulsory).

Forearm extensions with dumbbells: Perform these as per Workout A, but this time use dumbbells instead of the bar. Note that we're doing extensions first instead of flexions.

Forearm flexions with dumbbells: Perform these as per Workout A, but this time use dumbbells instead of the bar.

For the following triceps tri-set, you'll be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Lying triceps extensions: This is to be done lying on your back on a prone bench with your head just off the end of the bench. Take a medium grip on an EZ-curl bar with palms facing to the ceiling. Keep the upper arms just behind the vertical line of gravity and very still throughout the movement.



Lower the bar to your forehead. If the bar smacks you on the head causing you to see little birdies you might consider lowering the weight. Rest no more than ten seconds and go to the next exercise.

2) Close-grip bench presses: Use a grip with your hands about six to eight inches apart and use a full range of movement. If you need to, allow your hands to rotate such that the thumbs come out from under the bar and wrap around the top. Again, with no more than ten seconds rest, go to the next movement.



3) Full bodyweight dips: Use full bodyweight if you can get over six reps at this phase. (If you can't, use bench dips.) Use a full range of movement with the shoulders below the line of the elbows in the bottom position, but avoid a full lockout. Use a bar width that is just outside shoulders, and have the lower arm neutral.



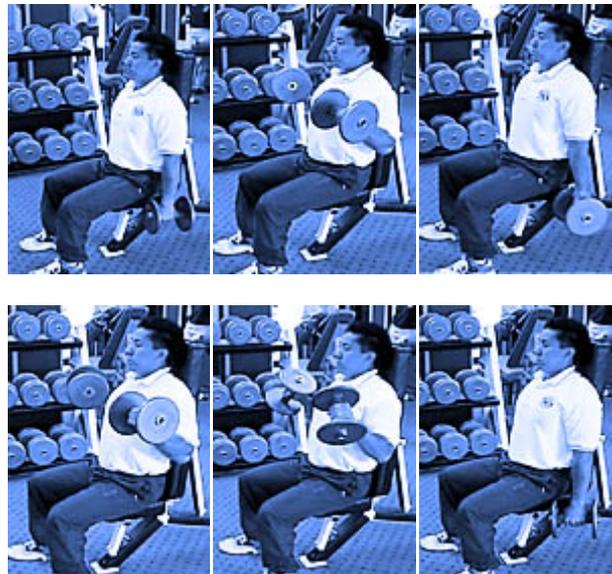
For the following biceps tri-set, you'll be doing three exercises in a row with nil to minimal rest between exercises.

1) Incline dumbbell curls with supine grip: Use an incline bench with about a 45-degree incline. The elbows should remain behind the body and very still throughout. Rest for no more than ten seconds while moving to the next exercise.



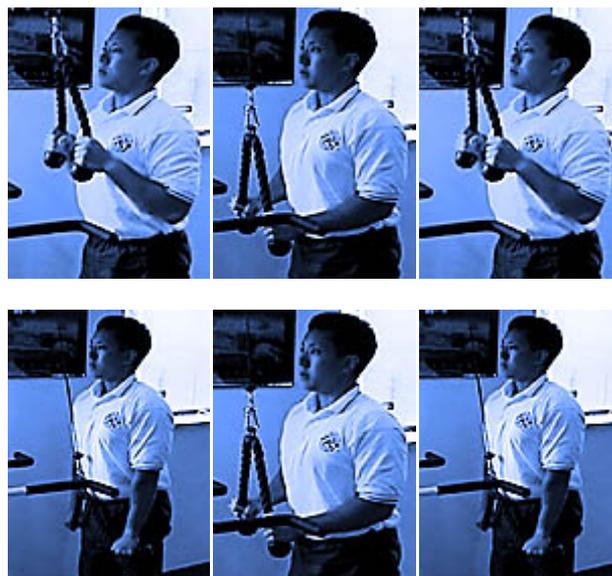
2) Seated dumbbell curls with twist: Sit on the end of a prone bench, arms and dumbbells by your side in a neutral or hammer grip. As you lift them, rotate your hands outward, taking the thumb out as far as you can by the time you reach the top of the movement. Don't allow the elbows to leave the side. As you lower the dumbbells, reverse the rotation so that you're back to neutral at the bottom. The rotation is progressive throughout the movement. Again, with no more than ten seconds rest, move to the next movement.

3) Seated Zottman curls: Seated at the end of a prone bench, raise the dumbbells with your palms up (supine). Elbows stay by the side. Now at the top, rotate your hands to a semi-pronated grip and then lower in this position. At the bottom, return to a supine grip before lifting again.



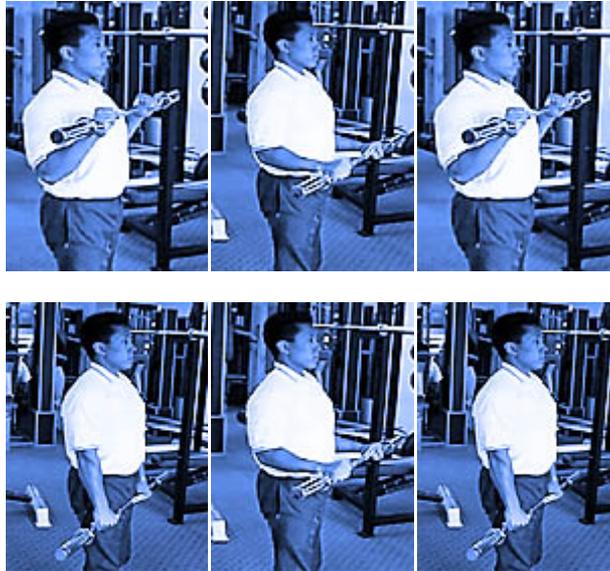
That completes the biceps tri-set. Take a rest and get ready for some more torture!

Neutral-grip rope triceps pressdowns: One advantage of the rope is the opportunity to take a neutral grip, but if you don't have a rope don't sweat it. Instead, take a normal, palms down grip on a bar attachment. The range of movement will be full extension, but only flex up until the point at which you feel the elbows want to move away from the body, which is something we don't want to happen here. The speed of movement will be 311, and I want you to use a variation of the old 21s again on this exercise.



Start with seven reps of the top half (the harder half) of the movement, followed by seven full-range reps, and finally seven reps at the bottom half (the easier half). Remember to pause each time before changing direction. The weight stays the same the whole time.

Reverse curls: Take a medium width grip with palms facing down on an EZ-curl bar. Keep the elbows by the side the whole time which will limit the concentric range. Make sure to come down to a full stretch at the end of the eccentric movement. Avoid body sway, but bend slightly at the knees and posteriorly rotate the pelvis.



Again, you'll be using the 21s method described above with seven reps at the top half of the movement, closest to the chest first, seven full-range reps, and then seven reps at the bottom half or the half further from the chest.

Triceps pulldowns: Take a *palms up*, shoulder-width grip on a straight bar attachment. Keep the wrist straight throughout and pull down to a full extension. Come up to the point prior to the arms leaving the side of the body.



In the work set, use a weight that causes fatigue around ten reps (it doesn't have to be exactly ten reps, but ideally within two reps either way), lighten the weight immediately and go again for another ten reps, and finally lighten the load again for a third and final set. If you need to take up to ten seconds rest between sets within the strip set this is okay, but ideally you'll want to minimize the rest in this first phase. You'll be performing three of these strip sets supersetted with the following exercise.

Very close-grip EZ-bar biceps curls: Take a very close grip on the EZ-curl bar with palms facing up (supine). Make sure your wrists are comfortable with this grip. The elbows will be more in front of the body than to the side, but still keep them still. This will limit the height of the bar in the concentric phase.



Again, stretch the biceps out fully at the end of the eccentric phase. Avoid body sway by using the slight knee bend, posterior pelvic tilt technique. In the work set, use the same strip set method as described above. Warm up if you need to with a light ten reps and alternate as a superset with the above exercise.

Here's a summary of the second upper body workout outlined in Phase I:

Forearm extensions with dumbbell

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Kneel on ground, palms down, forearms supported on bench, using bar	20 reps	20 reps	311	None, superset with forearm flexions

Forearm flexions with dumbbell

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Kneel on ground, palms up, forearms supported on bench, using bar	20 reps	20 reps	311	None, superset with forearm extensions

Triceps tri-set

1) Lying triceps extensions with EZ-bar

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Medium grip, palms facing up	10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422	None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

2) Close-grip bench presses with EZ-bar

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Hands 6-8 inches apart, feet on bench	10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422	None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

3) Full dips (bench dips if you're a wuss ... uh, I mean, beginner)

Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422	None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

Biceps tri-set

1) Incline dumbbell curls

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Palms up	10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422	None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

2) Seated dumbbell curls with a twist

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Starting in a neutral grip position	10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422	None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

3) Seated Zottman curls

Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
10 reps on each exercise	10 reps on each exercise	422	None, take just enough time to move to the next exercise in the tri-set

Neutral-grip rope triceps pressdowns

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Neutral grip	10 reps at normal range and speed	21s	311	Just enough to set up the next exercise

Reverse curls

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Medium overhand (prone) grip on EZ-bar, standing	10 reps at normal range and speed	21s	311	Just enough to set up the next exercise

Supine-grip triceps pulldowns

Position	Warm-up	Work set	Tempo	Rest
Supine (palms up) shoulder-width grip, two	10 reps	3 strip sets of about 10 reps each as outlined in	311	Superset with very close-grip EZ-bar biceps

arms together

text

curls

Very close-grip EZ-bar biceps curls

Position	Warm-up	Work set	TempoRest
Supine, medium grip, standing	10 reps at normal range and speed	3 strip sets of about 10 reps each as outlined in text	311 Superset with supine-grip triceps pulldowns

In Conclusion

Remember, this workout is for the first phase only. You'll be doing Workouts A and B during the same week (with at least three days between them, of course.) The other days in the week you'll be doing "maintenance" on your other muscle groups.

You may be "load-challenged" as a result of the way I've designed this first phase, but you'll regain peer group respect as far as poundages go in phases two and four. For now, focus on how to pump up those guns with *minimal* load! If you're able to brush your teeth and perform other daily hygiene activities with no discomfort in the guns, I'll be disappointed in you!

If you happen to survive Phase I, look for Phase II sometime in the next few weeks.

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