

Hack Squats – Old Way

By
Alan Palmieri

Years ago, when I first started working out, you would be hard pressed to find a hack squat unit in a gym; unless it was one of the rare fully equipped gyms. Back then, just as today, people were more inclined to favor other body parts leaving legs as a last resort or an afterthought. Some things never change and I believe in respect to leg work that holds true no matter what period of time we talk about. Squats, regardless of the type, are vital for optimum leg development. The vast majority of people will skip leg work more than any other body part simply because leg work is tough business.

Having used a great many hack machines, I've found some extremely well built that would hit the muscles at just the right angle. I've also used some that were really poorly designed, and to be honest dangerous to use. A good many of us prefer to train at home. The cost of a home hack machine is almost prohibited for most. The good thing is it is not really necessary as the quads can be worked just as intensely but not as conveniently without the use of a hack machine.

Most hack machines today are constructed on a 30 to 45 degree angle. This allows for the use of more weight but I don't believe it hits the quads nearly as well as some of the older units that were around at about a 60 degree angle. If you've never been fortunate enough to do hacks on a 60 degree angle you don't know what you're missing.



Today's traditional hip sled – hack squat / leg press machine. Notice the angle

No doubt 30 to 45 degree units allow more weight to be used than on the old 50 to 60 degree units but it's not the weight so much as it is the stress placed on the muscle and the movement properly executed that counts. To me a 50 to 60 degree angle is superior.

Today most units are combo leg press / hack squat machine; hip sleds are what many now call them. They are designed to allow the user to perform hack squats as well as leg presses. It's been years since I worked on a hack squat I really enjoyed. One with the 60 degree angle I've referred to.

Although I've never had the privilege of visiting his gym in person; Louisiana's own "Rajun Cajun" Steve Speyrer www.classicanatomygym.com, has a nice hack in his gym. Vintage for sure but one that requires stability and courage to use as its design will absolutely burn the quads in a manner far different from conventional units of today. How do I know? I've used similar ones in the past and I can tell you the burn is absolutely torture.



Two pictures from different angles show a truly nice hack unit.

Steve's unit is old school but nothing wrong with that for results. I've always had more success and respect for old school equipment. Each piece brought fun to a workout. Many have written critical comments about Weider's equipment from the 60's. I guess I was always lucky as the items I had were well

constructed and although designed for home use, the pieces I had could definitely be used in a busy gym. Talking of Weider, he produced a nice little hack squat unit that would also burn the quads. Don't find them at this angle anymore either. Check out the price!



Freddy Ortiz demonstrates a 1960's Weider Pro Hack Machine
Ad taken from a 1960's Mr. America Magazine

Back in the day, we would perform hacks with just the barbell behind our back... I still do them that way today. In fact, except for a very few really good machines, I would rather perform hacks freehand, bar held behind back. Absent one of the 50 to 60 degree units that is. I find today's versions of hack squat machines are angled far too much for my taste. The angle on most, are set so that it's almost like performing a reverse leg press. They seem to be designed for the purpose of handling weight rather than impact on the quads.

Some use hacks for a finishing movement when working quads. I like to use them as a pre-exhaust movement followed by back squats and then front

squats. I don't use the hack as often as I once did but I can still get a great leg workout anytime I add them in. At the start of my quad workout – in the middle – or at the end; hack squats are a great movement for the quads.

The way I perform hack squats are not necessarily unique or rare except maybe to those who are not old enough to remember a time when hack machines were not common place. I also have never tried to use maximum poundage in the movement as I've discovered it was not necessary for results. This movement can be used for both bulking as well as defining the quads. The trick is to work a hack until the quads are so fully pumped with blood they scream from pain.

I like to start by having the bar loaded and in a rack as I find it easier than starting with it on the floor. I may use a power rack, bar stands from any piece of equipment, or just a bench. If you prefer, you can begin with the weights on the floor but I find that difficult. Although I perform back and front squats flat-footed, I will place my heels on a 2 x 4 but I prefer a 4 x 4 when doing hacks as it helps stabilize my balance and I believe it helps place more emphasis on the lower quads.

Holding the bar behind my back I begin the up and down motion necessary to complete my desired number of reps and sets. Not too much weight, it's the feel and completeness of the movement I'm after. Want a real burn? Couple hacks with sissy squats.

Next workout "hack" it up!

www.PalmieriBodybuilding.com

© Alan Palmieri 2009