

Starting Strength

The power clean cannot be done slowly. Therefore there is no confusion over the nature of the exercise. The power clean is used in sports conditioning because it increases explosion and done correctly is the best exercise for converting the strength obtained in the other exercises to power. Since the nature of the vast majority of sports is explosive, involving the ability to accelerate the athlete's body or an object, the ability to accelerate is pivotal in sports performance. The power clean is our most important tool in the war against inertia.

In his famous book "The Strongest Shall Survive," Bill Starr included the power clean in his Big Three, with the comment that "If your program only allowed you to do one exercise, this would be the best." The power clean has always been used by weightlifters to train the clean, the more complete and more complicated version of the lift. The term "clean" refers to a way to get the bar clear of the floor "clean" to the shoulders. If this is accomplished in one movement, it is a clean; if in two (if it stops on the way up on the chest or a belt), it is referred to as a "Continental Clean". Heavier weights can be lifted in the Continental style, but a clean requires more power to make the bar complete its trip in a single effort. In the modern usage of the term, the "Clean" refers most commonly to a full squat clean (figure 1). It

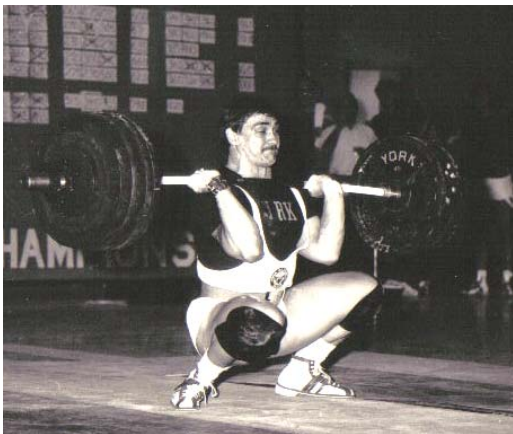


Figure 1. The power clean is a variation of the "Olympic" clean, a movement where the weight is caught in the full front squat position. Bill Starr cleans 435 at the 1969 nationals.



Figure 2. Another variant of the clean used commonly through the 70's was the split style clean. Note the depth of Bill Starr's split.

has not always been this way. The split clean – a style that made use of a forward/back split like that commonly used for the jerk in Olympic weightlifting – was used more commonly until the 1960's (figure 2), when the squat style began to be favored due to the heavier weights that could be lifted with this front squat-based technique. The term "power" as a qualifier in front of an exercise refers to an abbreviated version of a more involved movement, the shorter version being harder to perform at the expense of reduced technique requirements. A "power snatch" is a snatch without a squat or split, the use of which reduces the height the bar must be pulled. The "power jerk" is a version of the last part of the Clean and Jerk where the feet do not move. Likewise, the "power clean" is the version of the clean without a split and without too much squat.

The clean requires pulling the barbell up fast enough and high enough, using power generated by the hips and legs, to catch it on the shoulders. As such, the faster it comes up, the higher it will go and the higher the bar can be pulled the more weight can be cleaned. As a corollary, the lifter can clean more weight if he can get better at getting under a bar not pulled as