

Madcow-Bill Star 5x5

USAGE:

This program is based on weekly linear progress. You take your current 5 rep maxes (5RM) and work up to them systematically by increasing weights in steady increments over 3-4 weeks. You then hit your current 5RM on lifts and continue these incremental increases week to week which pushes you further and further out making new personal records (PRs) every week until you stall on the majority of your lifts. If you miss reps, keep the weight constant the next week and don't move it up until you get all 5x5. When you eventually stall on the majority of lifts, and you will, meaning something like several weeks of no progress in that you can't add reps or weight, you'll have to reset lower back several weeks and begin again. If it's just one lift that has you stuck, reset on that and work up again but don't restart the whole program. When restarting the whole program, a lot of times changing variables is also helpful here. I'm not going to cover that. Training is a blend of art and science, and knowing what parameters to change for a given lifter is more art. This is a cookie-cutter, it's meant to get you big and strong, and more importantly training correctly. The best programs are always tailored to a given trainee so being your own coach, you have to learn and seek out knowledge (generally not in bodybuilding sources as a rule and this will seldom do you wrong).

Rep speed is natural, time between sets is what you need. Don't rapid fire compound lifts but don't be lazy. 2-5 minutes is probably right with 5 minutes being needed after a very taxing effort.

If you've just randomly come to this topic or been provided a link - there is a large amount of information here: [Table of Contents](#)

CORE DESCRIPTION:

CAUTION - READ THIS: *if you are going to devote hours and hours over weeks and weeks to a program, please take 10-15 minutes to actually read this page and understand it. That's a retarded method of saving time. Also, you will find it hugely useful to read the [Training Primer](#) I put together. You will understand so much more about training in general if you read it. Honestly, save yourself years of learning and spend 10-15 minutes reading that page. Hell just print it out and leave it in the bathroom. Within a couple days, you'll have it finished and you will be so much further ahead than so many others. Also, please make sure to read the [Possible Issues](#) section below - **don't be a nimrod.***

Before beginning it is useful to know your 1 rep maxes or more ideally your real 5 rep max in each lift (there is a table and calculator in the TOC). If you don't know this - it might be useful to test your lifts first or start light and allow for some flexibility in the weekly planning. The whole key is the weekly progression and keeping workload low enough to not overwhelm someone with fatigue and enable them to get out in front and set records for as many weeks as possible. Said a different way, the stimulus is not getting under the bar once with heavy weight but getting under it frequently and systematically increasing week to week starting within your limits and slowly expanding.

Exercise	Sets x Reps	Details
Monday		
Squat	5x5	Ramping weight to top set of 5 (which should equal the previous Friday's heavy triple)
Bench	5x5	Ramping weight to top set of 5 (which should equal the previous Friday's heavy triple)
Barbell Row	5x5	Ramping weight to top set of 5 (which should equal the previous Friday's heavy triple)
<i>Assistance: 2 sets of weighted hypers and 4 sets of weighted sit-ups</i>		
Wednesday		
Squat	4x5	First 3 sets are the same as Monday, the 4th set is repeating the 3rd set again
Incline or Military	4x5	Ramping weight to top set of 5
Deadlift	4x5	Ramping weight to top set of 5
<i>Assistance: 3 sets of sit-ups</i>		
Friday		
Squat	4x5, 1x3, 1x8	First 4 sets are the same as Monday's, the triple is 2.5% above your Monday top set of 5, use the weight from the 3rd set for a final set of 8
Bench	4x5, 1x3, 1x8	First 4 sets are the same as Monday's, the triple is 2.5% above your Monday top set of 5, use the weight from the 3rd set for a final set of 8
Barbell Row	4x5, 1x3, 1x8	First 4 sets are the same as Monday's, the triple is 2.5% above your Monday top set of 5, use the weight from the 3rd set for a final set of 8
<i>Assistance: 3 sets of weighted dips (5-8 reps), 3 sets of barbell curls and 3 sets of triceps extensions (8 reps)</i>		

The Progression:

So it's pretty obvious what's going on in this example is weekly increases of 2.5% of your top set of 5 on Monday. So you do 100lbs for 5 on your top set on Monday. Then on Friday you do a triple with 2.5% more, or 102.5. The next Monday you come back and do 102.5 for your heavy set of 5, that Friday the triple is 105 and so on. For the non-squat Wednesday lifts you just increase by the percentage week to week.

Of course you start with a good margin to give yourself a run so you have to back into the initial weeks' weights. That means using some math. Put your current 5 rep maxes at week 4, figure out what 2.5% of the number is and go back and put that for week 3, do that back until you get to week 1. The Friday triple is always the next week's Monday set of 5. Pretty easy.*

Some people seem to think this is very slow progress (and maybe it is for a true beginner) but for most lifters this 2.5% weekly is fairly aggressive scaling. Think about building up for 4 weeks and then 2.5% compounded weekly on your personal records after that. If you can even get 4 weeks of PRs, that's over 10% on your lifts in just 8 weeks (there are people who would kill for this and many are lucky to manage 1-2% over that same time frame). People who can keep it up for anywhere near 12 weeks (8 weeks of PRs) are looking at 20%+ on their lifts. Even if one can't get long progression, this is still a good way to go for even a few increments as long as a lifter can make progress like this (and eventually they won't be able to and will have to do something a bit different that looks more like the [Advanced version](#)).

Program Week	Lift for 5 Reps	Percentage Increase Over Current Personal Record
4	200	0.00%
5	205	2.50%
6	210	5.06%
7	215	7.69%
8	221	10.38%
9	226	13.14%
10	232	15.97%
11	238	18.87%
12	244	21.84%
13	250	24.89%
14	256	28.01%
15	262	31.21%

Although given the chart and what I've said elsewhere on this page it should be obvious, I will clarify the point that this is not a 9 week program (I think some people have downloaded only the spreadsheet rather than reading since I figured 9 weeks of calculations was enough to get the idea - not much I can do about that).. You continue until it stops working. If you are adding 2.5% a week to your big lifts and eating enough to move the scale consistently, there is nothing else you can do from a program perspective to encourage muscular weight gain. Ride the horse and if lifts gives you trouble, either cut some warm up volume or reset it back a few weeks. When the majority of the lifts are stalling, reset the whole program and build back up to PRs over 4 weeks. Maybe change some variables (i.e. use 3x10) and/or some assistance lifts (front squat on Wed, lockouts instead of overhead).

Impact of Weight Gain/Loss and Experience Level:

I will also note that weight gain can be considered a tail wind to the progression. Meaning, you will have an easier time getting stronger and making a longer progression if you are eating enough to drive bodyweight upward during the program (i.e. also known as bulking or trying to add muscle, see [caloric excess](#)). This does not however mean that you should start heavier simply because you are planning to gain weight. The effect is typically not that strong and this is the best way to blow

this program up - always better to take more time than less. Another tailwind would be experience level, someone much closer to their ultimate potential is going to run out of steam and have to settle for shorter progressions than someone with 6 months of training under their belt.

A headwind would be dieting or cutting. If you are really making an effort to lose weight and using this program you might want to start significantly lighter or make smaller jumps week to week (i.e. take 6 weeks to reach your current 5RM rather than 4 weeks). Basically the same 200lbs 5 rep max squat at a bodyweight of 200 is a stronger lift at a lighter bodyweight. So if you are dropping bodyweight, you probably want think about starting lower because your 5RM estimates won't be accurate as your bodyweight changes and to get a reasonable shot at progression you don't want to be starting too high (that said, the less experienced the lifter they might have enough tailwind from their junior amount of experience to override a fair degree of headwind from bodyweight dropping).

Ramping Weights:

This is basically increasing your weight set to set like warming up. If your top set of 5 is 315, you might go 135, 185, 225, 275, and then 315 all for 5 reps. There are several reasons for this, you are warming up, getting a lot of practice and really groove the coordination of the lifts, and contributing to workload without raising it so high that fatigue overcomes you and you overtrain. If you do 315 for all 5 sets, workload is a lot higher and doing that a couple of times a week ensures that you won't last long on this program.

Typically jumps can be somewhere between 10-15% per set based on your top set (or 12.5% and round up or down). An easy way to figure this is to find out what 10% and 15% are for your top set and then track backwards into the other sets using the variance to round or help it make sense.

Example:

Your top set is 100lbs

10% is 10lbs and 15% is 15lbs

Your 5th set is 100x5, 4th is 90x5, 3rd is 80x5, 2nd is 70x5, and 1st is 60x5

These are the minimum jumps of 10%, the math doesn't always look this neat but using 12.5% isn't as intuitively easy to see for explaining this.

Make sure this makes sense and you aren't so strong as to make the jumps ridiculous at 10-15%. But keep in mind, going 200, 205, 210, 215, and 220 is a lot closer to 220 for 5x5 and that's too much on this kind of frequency, it will fatigue you a lot faster (i.e. prevent you from progressing) and hurt your ability to get as much as possible with your top set.

**Note: for the math inclined you probably realized that when moving up in weight you are taking 2.5% of the current weight but when I have you set up the initial weeks moving backward you are taking 2.5% off the forward week which is a slightly larger number than moving in the other direction. So if you want to really be exact, you can work it out the other way but the math is harder.*

Possible Issues:

If people get stuck early it's because they start too high. There is no negative to starting a bit more conservatively (just potential time spent acclimating at worst). On the other side, starting too aggressively can kill the whole program. You decide on whether you want to potentially risk a tad of time in the worst case scenario or waste all your time and blow it up getting zero results.

Particularly if people have issues with a lift the bench is where people get caught. A lot of guys have been training the bench hard forever. Probably high frequency and generally maxing it or using lower reps than their other lifts. Well, you want to push one lift hard and not bother much with others - you wind up with an asymmetry in your ability to adapt. You have to pay the price for not pushing as hard on your squat, deads, rows, and overhead regardless of the program and that's just how it is. This is compounded by not having plates lighter than 2.5lbs (so 5lbs jumps), which is often too much for people with the rounding and lifts that just aren't all that strong (look at the [Microloading](#) page). Also people put their true, best case 5RM with limited warm-up out at week 4. Most people won't have a problem but really, at week 4 you are expected to do the 5RM and do about 20 reps at varying weights beforehand. This makes week 4 a personal record in reality. Essentially, being more conservative with the bench is better especially if you are one of those die hard benchpress worshippers.

In regards to the squatting or frequency, if you haven't squatted at all, or don't squat full range or haven't done much before it can be an issue particularly if you have enough training to move some weight. Most people haven't had a problem but particular to the squats a few people have wound up with overuse issues. It's not that people can't squat 3x per week - anyone can. It's a matter of conditioning someone to be able to do it at the volume and intensities that this program calls for and acclimating to it immediately. Just like walking 2 miles a day, anyone can do it but if you sit on the couch and your movement is limited to 100 yards per day to get the mail and feed yourself - well it might take some time to build up. Most importantly, if you start to get these issues (and not muscle soreness) but a chronic aching and soreness in the joints/tendons/muscles etc...you need to back off and not keep pushing. That doesn't mean you get a little sore in week 1 and quit, this will take a few weeks but once this type of thing shows up don't just keep pushing. A coach would have you back off or likely not start you here, you don't have a coach so you have to use your brain. It just

might take 4-5 weeks to build up and get things in shape to be able to begin this program. That's okay but if you keep pushing and wind up with serious tendonitis it can take a while to resolve itself. Not worth it. This was covered on the [Table of Contents Intro Page](#) under the second topic but obviously people don't read everything so it's here too (and I assume some won't bother reading this either but you reap what you sow). Like I said before, in general it isn't an issue but a program is just a 'point in time' example, some people might be ready for that point, some won't. I tried to set this up where it should be okay for just about everyone, that doesn't mean that a few people may not have an issue with the parameters.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION

The Lifts:

Squats - these should be full range Olympic style squats. Use the full range of your body - that means as low as you can go which for almost everyone is past parallel. If the top of your thighs aren't at least parallel it's for shit. If you think this is bad for your knees going low, you and whoever told you that are relying on an old wives tale. Anyone who knows the human body will tell you that below parallel is MUCH safer on the knees whereas parallel and above put all the sheer right on them and doesn't allow proper transfer of the load to the rest of your body (this is how your body was designed). Read the Squat article from Arioch linked in the TOC for a complete description and references on the mechanics of the squat and depth.

Deads - each rep is deweighted fully on the floor. No touch and go. This is called the 'dead' lift because the weight is 'dead' on the ground. You can touch and go warm ups but that's it.

Military - standing overhead presses. Supporting weight overhead is a fundamental exercise and stimulates the whole body. Push presses are a fine substitute.

Rows - 90 degrees and done dynamically (Accelerate the weight into your body - do not jerk it but constantly increase the pace like an oar through water). There is a TOC topic on rows, a good read that also illustrates a version done from the floor.

Common Sense - you should know how to do the lifts before starting a program like this. Start light and learn. Don't include brand new compound lifts that have you training near your limit without some time in. This is how you get hurt. Compound lifts load the entire body and are very effective. If you have a weak link, they will bring it up - of course if you haven't trained the lift long enough for this to happen your weak link may get you hurt. Use your brain.

The rest is self explanatory.

Time Between Sets:

Don't over think this. Use a natural rep speed, take what you need between sets. Don't be lazy but don't rush. You can't be doing rapid fire sets of big compound lifts. Maybe on the lightest warm-ups you take a minute but most sets will be 2-5 minute range with 2 being between fairly easy sets and 5 being after a heavy set in preparation for another very serious major effort that drains you. I can see exceeding the 5 minute limit by a tad when really pushing near failure in the PR weeks when you are uncertain of getting your reps on your last set. Just use your brain and don't micromanage.

Diet:

Depends on whether you are trying to gain muscle or what. I will say that for gaining muscle, caloric excess must be present. Read the caloric excess topic in the table of contents. More people, particularly bodybuilders, go wrong here. If caloric excess is present and training stinks, you will get fatter. The few guys who have come back with no weight gain got very strong and gained no net weight - guess what - they were already fairly lean (i.e. no excess in their diet otherwise they'd have been fatter) and they didn't gain fat or muscle (no caloric excess during training). There's nothing any program can do if you won't eat. For the purposes of gaining muscle or getting big and strong it's better to eat McDonalds and KFC all day long than not eat enough Zen clean ultra pure food which might be healthier but if not enough there's simply nothing to use to grow. So caloric excess is a requirement, you don't need to eat like a slob but it will work infinitely better than not eating enough healthy food for this purpose. Lots of people have gotten big and strong on diets that were bad, if you choose to eat squeaky clean, kudos to you but it is not critical to putting on muscle (it might be critical to a long high quality life though). If you need a more in depth explanation, look [here](#).

Incorporating the Olympic Lifts:

The above is basically setup for someone who doesn't know the OLs. Starr's original workout included Power Cleans and High Pulls. Instead of Bent Rows substitute Power Cleans. Rather than Deads substitute High Pulls. That's a quick and dirty way of handling this without much disruption.

Substituting Exercises:

Don't fuck with this. Every bodybuilder seems to have Attention Deficit Disorder and an overwhelming desire to customize everything. The bottom line is that these are all the most effective exercises and just about anything one does will result in less gains. As a rule those people who want to change it don't know enough to make proper alterations - those who do know enough, don't have much to change. The guy who is responsible for this program is of the best on the planet at bulking lifters and making people stronger. It's kind of like Sesame Street's Elmo offering neurosurgery advice at NYU. Anyway, it's absolutely essential not to screw with the squats, they are the foundation of this program. If you want to sub inclines or push presses for military that's okay. Do not sub machines - don't even think about it, hit yourself with a plate if you must. For arms choose a single biceps and triceps exercise and perform them at the end once per week for 3 sets of whatever - your arms will take a beating from all the pulling and pressing anyway. If you want to chin on Wednesday or do a few sets of pulldowns/ups that's fine (avoid the machines if you can use bodyweight). Core work is always fine. Cardio is fine - interval training is the best for this I'll just throw out. If this is just too much mental strain, take solace in the fact that it's just a few weeks, you'll gain a ton of muscle and strength and then you can spend the next 4 weeks adding the minute detail to refine the gained mass (like most care anyway - I have yet to meet a guy on this board who will trade 20lbs of muscle for a bit of added detail somewhere). In a nutshell, put your trust in some of the better coaches on the planet and enjoy the results.

New or Beginner Lifters:

This is not a beginner program. You will make faster progress with less workload on a true beginner program. I really recommend Rippetoe's [Starting Strength](#) for beginners or novices. It's so critical to learn the lifts correctly and get started on a good program (i.e. not what one typically finds on bodybuilding sites). Rippetoe is the man at coaching beginners and putting muscle on them with 30-40lbs in 4-6 months being quite normal. The book will handle teaching you all the lifts. It's written for coaches and no, given what I see in commercial gyms, the internet and Joe

Schmoe at your local gym are not capable of instructing you properly - they will screw you up and make you look like a moron or possibly get you hurt. On top of that the book covers everything to get you set up on a program that is time proven as one of if not the best beginner programs available.

Advanced Lifters:

After a while, linear progress doesn't work so well. You want to do this for as long as you can. And I mean, resetting and running at your records, changing some exercises, rep ranges, whatever, just keep trying to get some linear progress as you want to milk this kind of progression for all it's worth. After a while it will become pretty obvious this doesn't work for you any more. Welcome to periodization.