

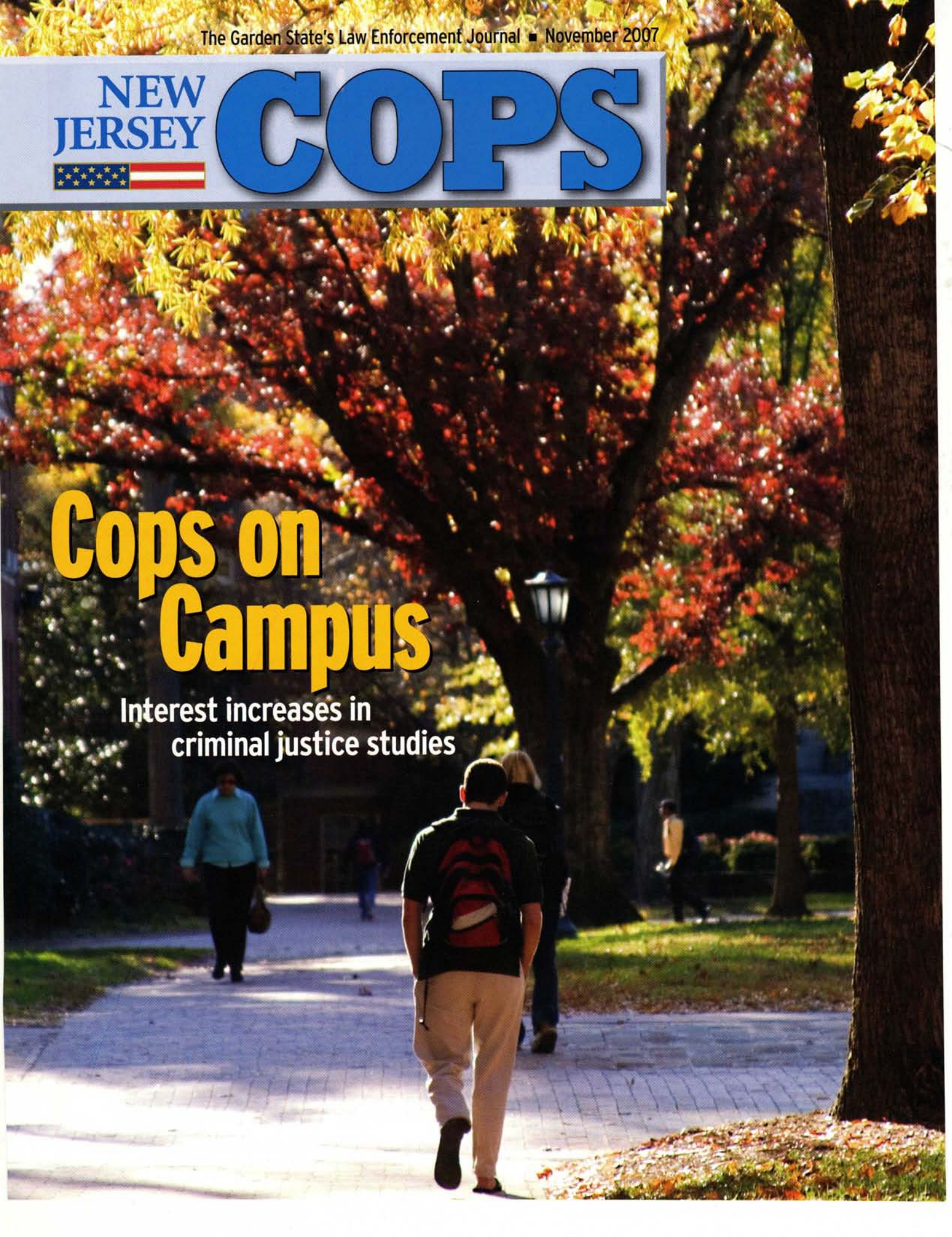
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Buying fitness equipment for the home

■ BY MATT BRZYCKI

The holiday season is a very popular time for people to purchase fitness equipment for their homes. With so many different types of fitness equipment from which to choose, decisions on this all-important investment aren't easy.

What follows are some general suggestions to help you make a wise and informed decision. The suggestions are most applicable to purchasing aerobic equipment – such as elliptical trainers, rowers, stationary bicycles and treadmills – but can also assist you in purchasing home gyms or other multi-station apparatus.



**Matt
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GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

The intent here is to provide you with general suggestions for making purchases. However, specific equipment will not be recommended; specific manufacturers or dealers will not be endorsed. For recommendations on specific pieces of equipment, you should consult buyer-friendly publications such as Consumer Reports and Consumers Digest.

When purchasing fitness equipment, you should consider these things:

- **Stay away from cheap products.** As they say, "You get what you pay for." This statement is especially true of fitness equipment. You should buy products that are made by reputable manufacturers that have a proven track record. Look at it this way: There's a good chance that the money you save on purchasing low-cost equipment will eventually be spent on making high-cost repairs.

- **Consider low-end commercial equipment.** Sometimes, there's not much of a price difference between high-end residential equipment and low-end commercial equipment. Besides, the added durability of a commercial-grade product may compensate for its extra cost.

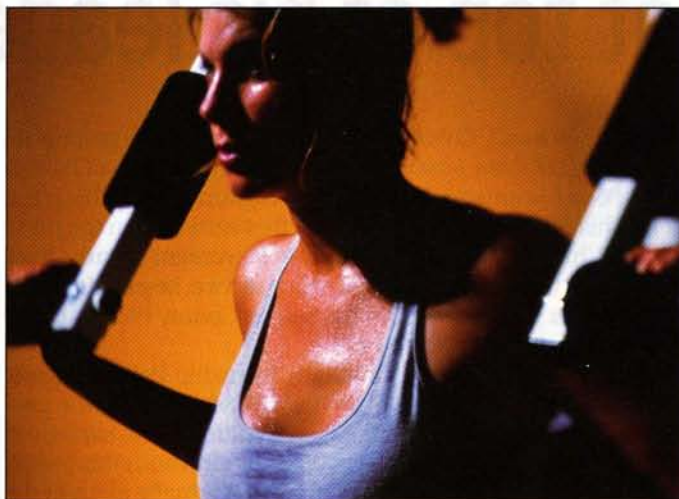
- **Research the equipment before you go to a dealer.** This way, you'll be more knowledgeable about the equipment and have a better understanding of how it functions and what it might cost.

- **Give it a try before you buy.** You wouldn't want to purchase an automobile without first taking it for a spin, would you? Most dealers have showrooms where you can "test drive" equipment. And when you do try it out, take your time.

- **Buy equipment that you'll use.** For example, don't purchase a stationary bicycle if you don't enjoy cycling in one place. In all likelihood, it'll end up collecting dust in a desolate area of your home.

- **Get detailed information about the warranty.** Find out what's covered. Is it a bumper-to-bumper warranty? Usually, the frame and most or all of the parts are covered but it's important to find out for sure. Also learn how long the frame and parts are covered. Remember, warranties can be different for different parts. The frame might be covered for several years but some parts for only several months. Is labor included in the warranty? If so, how long is it included?

- **Find out exactly what happens if the equipment needs to**



be repaired. Is the dealer responsible for contacting the manufacturer to obtain a repair part or is that up to you? The part might be under warranty but who actually makes the repair? Does the dealer send one of its technicians to your home or is the onus on you? If you have to get a technician, how much does it cost?

- **Clarify the return policy.** At what point are you no longer eligible for a full refund?

- **Shop around.** Get specifics on the equipment that you want to purchase and visit other dealers to evaluate their prices and warranties. Make sure that you compare apples to apples, though. For example, don't simply compare the price of a treadmill that's made by one manufacturer to that of another without also considering the specifications. Likewise, don't compare different models of a treadmill that are made by the same manufacturer since different models have different specifications.

- **Ask about the availability of showroom models or close-outs.** If available, you can save a considerable amount of money. Oftentimes, showroom models are perfectly fine except for a few minor nicks or dings.

- **Determine if delivery and installation are included in the price.** If you have access to a pick-up truck and you're handy with tools, you can save some lunch money by doing the delivery and assembly by yourself or with the help of a friend.

- **Negotiate your purchase.** Ask the salesperson, "Is this the best price that you can give me?" If the individual won't budge on the price, perhaps you can make a deal for free delivery, an upgrade or an extended warranty.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Depending on your approach, purchasing fitness equipment for your home can either be one of the best investments that you ever made or one of the worst. So, make sure that you go about it the right way.

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