

# POLE POSITIONS

Anna Jillings impressed loads of us with her UV pole-spinning routines at the Birmingham convention. Luckily for you, she'd already given away some of her secrets for the exclusive edification of Catch readers. You might not end up looking as good, but, hey, with the lights off, who's to know?

To add pole spinning to your repertoire, just find a long to medium length stick (such as a broom handle or devil stick) and a space to practice. This introduction is based primarily upon holding the stick inside the hand, see Diagram I. You will find that many of the fastest moves involve flexing the wrist as opposed to



**Diag. I**  
Hold loosely between thumb & forefinger

manipulating the stick between the fingers.

When it comes down to it, all pole spinning patterns are just different kinds of circles around the body. Be aware of how the move looks from the front

so that the pole is tracing a complete and rounded circular pattern. When possible, check this by practising in front of a mirror.

There are two types of trick with a single stick - those which involve only one hand, and those which need both hands. Various orientations for moves with the left hand (LH) and right hand (RH) include - forwards (where the wrist moves in the direction it would if you were holding a skipping rope and skipping forwards), backwards (the wrist motion when skipping backwards) and sideways i.e. the 90° angle to the front.

First warm up - and shake out the arms and wrists well!

## Trick 1 Under and Over Arm Helicopters with one hand See Diagram II

With a medium-to-small length stick (e.g. a devil stick), hold the centre between thumb and first finger in a kind of pinch. Decide on an end X and rotate this end in a helicopter motion so that it traces out a flat circle, parallel to the floor, overarm. The opposite end will be doing the same, except underarm. You can build up speed for extra twirling of the stick between the fingers when overarm. It can be done with either hand, forwards, backwards, and with two sticks simultaneously, together or off sync.



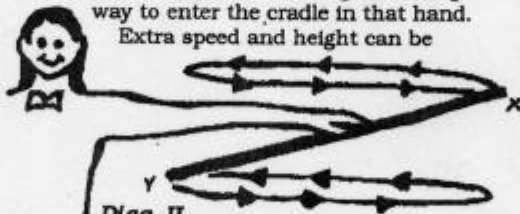
Anna Jillings - under a light!

## Trick 2 Cradle Rotation with one hand See Diagram III

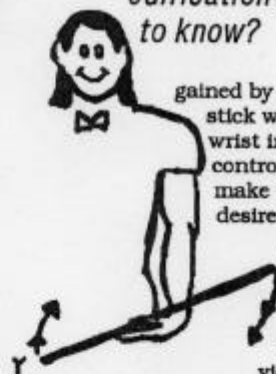
Hold the centre of the pole so that your knuckles are on top. Loosen your grip and turn the hand over 180° (RH turn clockwise and LH turn anticlockwise). The stick is now visible in the palm. Turn another 90° so that the pole has one end over the wrist as though you were cradling it (Diagram III). Only the thumb is keeping it in place; this may feel uncomfortable at first. Next, give a little lift whilst releasing the grip so that the pole leaves the hand and does a 180° turn. Catch the pole in the middle with a gentle snatch down as it completes this 180° turn. Because the pole is always in contact with your body, with practice this becomes a very reliable method of one hand rotation. Try with each hand and sideways, also both hands off sync.

## Trick 3 Throwing and Catching a Spinning Pole

From a cradle position (Diagram III) increase the amount of lift when you let go so that the pole completes its rotation in the air. Watch the pole! You catch by reaching for the pole when it's horizontal - from above (knuckles on top) if catching with the same hand, or from below if catching with the other hand. Note that if you catch with the other hand, you cannot continue the move because the pole is rotating the wrong way to enter the cradle in that hand.



**Diag. II**  
Under & Over Arm Helicopters



**Diag. III**  
Cradle Rotation

gained by throwing before the stick wraps around the wrist in a cradle, but more control is then needed to make the flight take the desired path.

## Trick 4 Front Propeller with both hands

To spin clockwise, from the spinner's viewpoint, first hold the centre of the pole in the LH, upright, parallel to your legs. Turn the pole clockwise until it must travel

over the back of the hand. At this point, the RH reaches over the LH and takes the pole just above the LH in a thumbs down, palm-down grip. This will cause the spin to steady. Release the LH. The pole will continue to rotate around the RH, which turns until the palm faces upwards. At this point the LH reaches under the RH, palm up, and takes the pole. Try this spinning anticlockwise too.

As with all types of juggling there are an infinite number of pole spinning variations. The above are just a few of the central grip tricks and there are many types of non-central holds as well as sliding grips to explore. Adjust the length of the pole to suit. My poles are generally not more than twice the length of my arm, but martial arts forms, which can be very graceful with sticks, tend to advise a longer length, even as much as your own height.

Smoothness, particularly of the transitions between tricks, is worth working on. Make up ways of passing the stick behind your back, under the legs, try pirouettes with front propellers, treblas, snakes,

reels plus combinations. There are no rules, except being aware of anything within range - pole spinning has a high accident potential, I am forever replacing light bulbs!

If you have heard of any books on pole spinning/ baton twirling or related subjects, I would very much like to know. I have begun to write an introductory guide to Pole Spinning which will hopefully be published this summer. Contact Anna Jillings, Cosmos Juggling Company, York. Tel. 0904 430472 or write to Brinkworth Park House, Elvington, York. UK YO4 5AT

*From more workshops like this get the book:*

**Modern Club Swinging  
and Pole Spinning**

Butterfingers 1994. ISBN 0 9513240 8 X. © Anna Jillings

Download the entire book for free from:

**[www.cosmosjugglers.co.uk](http://www.cosmosjugglers.co.uk)**

See the *Holidays* pages for Anna's annual May and August UK events for club swingers, poi & pole spinners, jugglers, fire enthusiasts and glow-in-the dark/UV performers.