

## CHAPTER 7

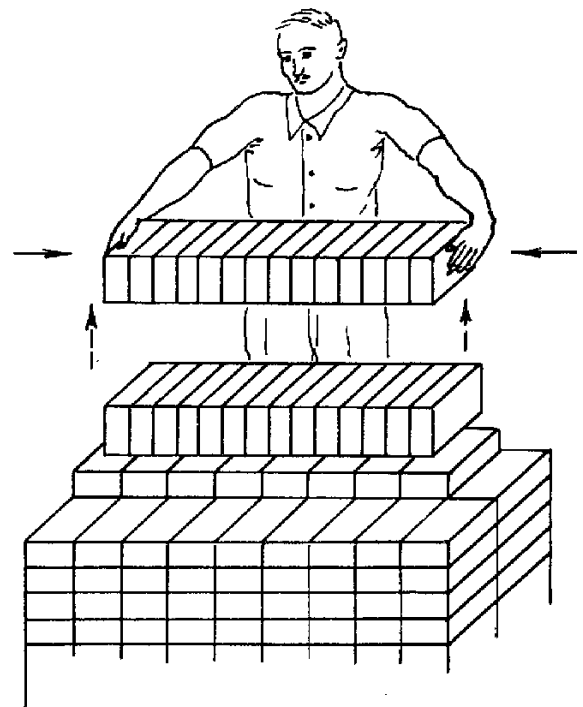
**His Attitude to Lifting and Feats of Strength**

I HAVE been an actual eye witness of 75% of Hermann Görner's best feats of strength. I have personally judged, checked and recorded nearly 1,400 public lifts and feats of strength performed by this wonderful superman. The feats, lifts and stunts have been as varied as the ingenuity of Hermann could devise. Hermann made no rehearsal of his feats—in the majority of cases these were impromptu and gave no indication of his maximum powers.

Authorities other than myself have unanimously agreed that his gigantic strength has never been plumbed and that had he had the ambition to specialize or to go into disciplined training, he would have established records that would have stood for all time. It should be noted that many of his best feats were actually accomplished after the age of 40. At the age of 43, he created world records in weight lifting.

"My health is more important than a record," he would retort, when zealous fans would advise him to go after records. He lifted for the sheer pleasure of testing his super-human powers.

"Variety is the spice of life," declared Hermann. He was an all-round strong man and had no love for the monotonous 'Olympic Three' as the be-all and end-all of a lifter. Görner practised all lifts,



Picking up a total of 14 bricks weighing 123½ lb. (56 kilos) from a stack. The bricks were lifted by being squeezed together—at no time were the upper arms or bricks in contact with the body.

including very many that are not in the book, but he did not favour the Bent Press, which he considered a 'trick lift', adapted for long-trunked and short-legged men, who can very easily bend far to the side. He also frowned on 'expander' exercises, believing that such forms of exercise destroyed the explosive force needed in performing quick lifts. Teeth lifting he considered a most unnatural method of showing one's strength. A 'nonsense' feat to use his own expression!

Görner has never received training or any formal instruction from anyone other than himself. His methods were simply of his own devising. Right from his very inception to the world of Strength in 1905, he trained himself and showed others that he had the goods and a most efficacious system to bring about such a happy state of affairs.

At the lifting of kettleweights, Hermann was certainly the world's best exponent. Dumb-bells also took up a considerable amount of his training time, as well as the more orthodox feats performed with the barbell. He was a great believer in mixing slow movements with weights, such as Curls and Presses in with faster Jerks and Snatches, in order to create all-round lifting efficiency.

As a proof of his agility, notwithstanding his great body-weight, Hermann has performed a standing high jump, with heels together, over a chair of 32 in. high. He has also made a standing broad jump of 10 ft. 4 in. at a time when he weighed over 20 stone. The best proof of Görner's incomparable strength and sheer bodily power can be gauged by his stupendous performances on the double and single-handed dead lifts. Hermann's method of performing the dead lifts was the hardest way.

There was no resting of the bell on the thighs above the knees or shifting of the grips. Just one mighty pull only and he stood erect and held the weight for more than the required period.

His records were almost without exception performed 'cold', without any preliminary 'warming up' with lighter weights. Very few people are aware that he actually performed the colossal feat of a One-hand Dead Lift of 727½ lb. on a Berg revolving barbell, on 8th October, 1920, at Leipzig. On the same Berg barbell—which was, of course, a straight bar and not a cambered one—he did his Two-hands Dead Lift of 793½ lb., twenty-one days later. This stupendous weight was held for five seconds in the finishing position. As a witness of this feat, I will remember the frantic enthusiasm of his audience and the smiling and unruffled acknowledgment of Hermann. After a few minutes' pause, Görner asked for 300 kilos (661 lb.) to be put on the bar with which he proposed to perform a Right-hand Dead Lift. At the first attempt he lifted the bar parallel to his front with the right hand correctly, to the unanimous approval of the judges, fixing and holding it in the finishing position for four seconds. On weighing the bell, it was found to turn the scales at 301 kilos, i.e., 663½ lb. This feat received thunderous applause from his audience. As a matter of interest, his body-weight at the time was 220½ lb. (100 kilos).

Certain writings outside of Germany have carried many garbled reports on Hermann's extraordinary Dead Lifting ability. Calculated it would seem to reflect unfavourably on the appliances used. One writer has claimed that Görner used a 10 ft. bar

specially made for the occasion with, it was alleged, slotted discs. The ignorance of the writers of these statements is more to be pitied than condemned. It may be stated quite categorically that in all his Dead Lifts Herman Görner used the well-known Berg 'Hantel' with ordinary discs and straight bar. I would like to go on record as saying that long special bars with slotted plates were unknown in any of the Clubs where Hermann lifted, although I understand that barbells with such plates or similar were used in Dead Lifts by some lifters in other parts of Europe.

I respect the great feats of the famous French lifters, Rigoulot and Cadinc, but their best performances on the Dead Lifts, both double and single-handed, can hardly be compared with the lifts of Görner. Rigoulot's best Two-hands Dead Lift was  $621\frac{3}{4}$  lb. and his Right-hand Dead Lift, 450 lb. Cadinc's best was  $617\frac{1}{4}$  two-hands, with a Single-handed Dead Lift of  $449\frac{3}{4}$  lb.

My own conviction is that had Hermann Görner ever had serious competition from other Strong Men, he would have been inspired to accomplish a Two-hands Dead Lift not far short of the enormous weight of 900 lb.

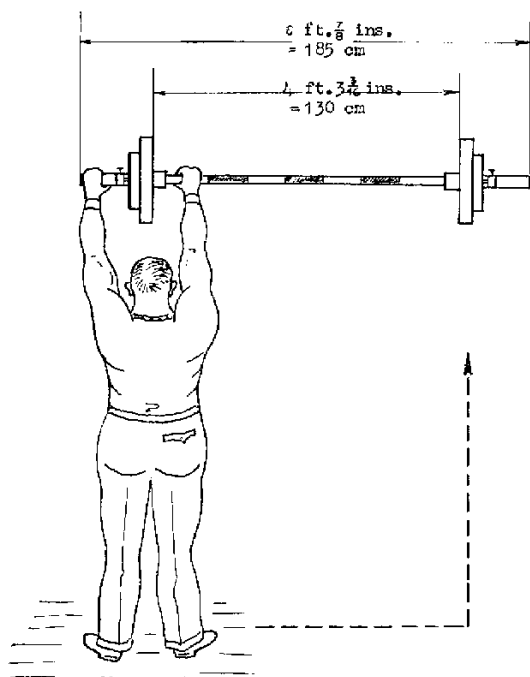
In 1921 Hermann sustained a knee injury which permanently affected his maximum poundages with such lifts as the Two-hands Dead Lift. Although he was unfamiliar with the British cambered bars, he did do some training in London in W. A. Pullum's Gymnasium, but his best feats in England, although classed as world records, were much behind his records performed earlier in Germany. Surely his stupendous feat performed at the age of 42 on 18th August, 1933, in Leipzig, when he

executed a Dead Lift with barbell and human weights totalling 830 lb., gives some indication of his true powers!

What would Hermann have done, when lifting at his best in a contest on the Two-hands Dead Lift in competition with the present day American lifters, Bob Peoples and Bill Boone, can only be left to the imagination. Peoples has lifted the amazing poundage of  $725\frac{1}{2}$  lb., whilst weighing only 189 lb. himself. Boone's best Two-hands Lift was around 700 lb. All Hermann's training mates, and I might add myself, knowing Hermann's amazing ability when lifting at his best, hold the firm conviction that, if Görner had specialized in Dead Lifting for such a contest, he would easily have topped 850 lb.

Hermann regarded Dead Lifting and carrying of heavy weights as fundamental tests of bodily strength. Such lifts as hand and thigh lifting, finger lifting, back lifting and harness lifting never interested him. Had it been otherwise, it is my considered opinion that he would have set records that would have stood for all time.

Hermann's hundred and one ways of demonstrating his all-round strength were of such a high order that other 'Kings of Strength', such as Saxon, Steinbach, Swoboda, Cyr, Apollon and Rigoulot, would have found him more than a match for them in an all-round contest. In his Stage and Circus performances, Hermann delighted in devising new ways at demonstrating his stupendous powers. His fertile mind was the originator of many unique and astounding stunts. His deportment before his audiences was one of grace and elegance. All his feats of strength were performed stylishly and



GÖRNER handled a barbell in every possible position. Grasping a barbell of 132½ lb. (60 kilos) with the left hand over the sleeve—2 in. in diameter—and with the right hand gripping the shaft tight against the inside collar (closer than shown in sketch), Hermann performed a Two-Hands Snatch from the floor, without moving his feet! Performed on a SCHWEDLER-type revolving barbell, on 27th October, 1931, in LEIPZIG.

easily, his countenance bearing a smile, as he completed his astounding feats of strength.

Hermann possessed amazing forearm and wrist strength, which he demonstrated in no uncertain manner in the sport of 'Wrist Wrestling'. On 17th December, 1934, our hero took on six famous International Professional Wrestlers in Leipzig's Crystal Palace. At this particular time Hermann and myself were judges in the Professional Greco-Roman Wrestling Contest. The opponents of Hermann in Wrist Wrestling were all well over 6 ft. in height, the tallest of them being no less than 6 ft. 4½ in. All six men were beaten by Hermann in just one minute. This was startling tribute to his terrific wrist and forearm strength, as some of the men he beat possessed biceps of over 18 in. In this contest the six men were seated at a table on one side, whilst Hermann occupied the opposite side of the table. Starting with the first man, he rapidly downed his arm and carried on along the row of men until he came to the sixth. As has been already stated, he flattened the forearm of the sixth man before one minute had elapsed. At the finish of this contest Hermann called out smilingly, "Next gentleman, please", but there were no takers. This demonstration of his overwhelming strength left his audience gazing at him in amazement.

One evening, after our usual work-out in the Club, we repaired to our favourite rendezvous, a small restaurant nearby. As the night was cold, the manager requested his wife to bring some more fuel for the stove. This she did and as the manager searched for a hammer with which to break the briquettes, Hermann took the pieces from the hands of the good lady and quite nonchalantly split

every one neatly in two by the power of his hands. A total of 15 briquettes, filling a full-sized pail!

On another occasion, an enthusiast asked Hermann, "What can you do in tearing a pack of cards?" "I don't know," came back the reply. Expecting to see Hermann fail, the enthusiast handed him three complete sets of unused German playing cards, plus some additional loose cards—totalling 110 in all. In exactly one second, Hermann's great hands had torn asunder the whole pack of 110 cards!

On occasions, Hermann liked to demonstrate his terrific grip strength. Using the right hand only, he has 'pinch lifted' two 15 kilo plates. These, when placed together, were 2 $\frac{3}{8}$  in. thick and just over 14 $\frac{1}{2}$  in. in diameter. Through the centre hole of the discs was driven a thick leg of a chair, to which an additional 20 kilos was attached. The whole weight altogether was 111 lb. and, using thumb and fingers only, Hermann 'pinch lifted' this from the floor to the hang, holding the weight nonchalantly for several seconds. The sketch on page 102 shows clearly how this lift was made. This was an impromptu feat of strength and at no time has Hermann specialized in 'pinch lifting'.

A feat of arm strength that should be recorded was Hermann's lift which surpassed that of Louis Cyr's stupendous feat of passing over the counter of his bar-room, his tiny wife of 100 lb. seated on his right hand. This lift Hermann bettered in the following manner: After doing a Right Hand Military Press with kettleweight of 110 $\frac{1}{4}$  lb. (50 kilos) he lowered the weight—which was balanced on his palm—to waist level, and stretching out his right arm he passed it over the table to the Author, smilingly, with the words, "So, Edgar. Now

duplicate it". Performed in Leipzig on 10th July, 1932.

Just before the first World War, when working in the Krupp Ammunition Factory at Essen, Hermann lifted, in a whimsical moment, a shell weighing 784 lb. (355.6 kilos) which he carried and, as a practical joke, placed the huge projectile on the manager's desk, giving that good man the shock of his life. It was some considerable time before the manager was convinced that it had not been deposited there with the aid of a small crane. On another occasion, whilst working in the same factory, Hermann accepted a wager and won it when he took a wheelbarrow, fully loaded with 30 iron castings of a total weight of between 3,100–3,400 lb., and without the assistance of shoulder straps, gripped the shafts of the barrow, stood erect and succeeded in wheeling and balancing this enormous load for the required distance. When touring South Africa from 1924–26 with Pagel's Circus, Hermann's daily wrestle with an elephant used to bring the house down. When he first incorporated this feat into his Act, the elephant was a small bull, weighing 700 lb. (317 $\frac{1}{2}$  kilos). Hermann continued his daily wrestling with the animal up to the time his contract with the Circus expired, many months later, by which time the elephant had grown in weight to no less than 1,500 lb. (680.4 kilos). 'Some' wrestling partner for a mere human weighing 250 lb. odd!

During his stay in England, where Görner was introduced to the British public by the well-known W. A. Pullum, the former 9 stone World's Weight Lifting Champion, Hermann publicly repeated some of his own particular feats. He had lifted

greater poundages in Leipzig, when a younger man, but in spite of the toll of the years and his war wounds, the performances are worth recording here for the sake of comparison. Among many lifts the following may be cited :—

151½ lb. (68.72 kilos). Right-hand Snatch with barbell. Bar was snatched from two chairs. (Later surpassed with 154¼ lb. (70 kilos) on October 2nd, 1931, in Leipzig.)

200¾ lb. (91.06 kilos). Right-hand Swing with dumb-bell.

224½ lb. (101.8 kilos). Two Dumb-bells Swing. (Surpassed by him with 233¾ lb. (106 kilos) on 25th May, 1933, at Leipzig.)

The above were performed on 16th July, 1927, at Clapham, London, on the occasion of the British 9 Stone Amateur Championships.

279½ lb. (126.7 kilos). Right-hand Clean (only) with barbell. (Görner's best Right-hand Clean was 297½ lb. (135 kilos) on November 9th, 1919, in Leipzig.)

302¼ lb. (137.1 kilos). Two-hands Clean and Jerk with barbell. In this feat the bar was lifted from two chairs—the stationary 'hang' position—then jerked to arm's length. (This lift was surpassed with 319¾ lb. (145 kilos) on November 23rd, 1931, in Leipzig.)

Both the above were performed on 13th August, 1927, at Clapham, London, on the occasion of the 11 Stone British Amateur Championships.

336¾ lb. (152¾ kilos). Two-hands Clean and Jerk. Jerked twice from the shoulders, once from in front and once from behind the neck. Performed on 2nd July, 1927, at Clapham, on the occasion of the 8 Stone British Amateur Championships.

During his stay in England, Hermann jerked from behind the neck a barbell with human weights making a total of 392 lbs. (177.8 kilos) on 9th August, 1927, at Llanelly; later increased to 411 lb. (186.4 kilos) on 23rd January, 1928, at Oldham. In both of these lifts, the men and the barbell were weighed. Lifting at the famous Camberwell Weight Lifting Club and other London venues, Hermann performed a Right-hand Dead Lift of 602¼ lb. (273.18 kilos), a Left-hand Dead Lift of 501 lb. (227¼ kilos) and a Two-hands Dead Lift of 652¼ lb. (295.86 kilos), the latter lift being performed on 15th March, 1927, at the National Sporting Club. The referee on this occasion being the well-known British Weight Lifting Historian, Writer and Official, W. J. LOWRY.

#### *Feat of Abdominal Strength*

A barbell weighing 198½ lb. (90 kilos) was placed across a bench. Görner sitting astride the same bench first lifted the bar 'clean' with both hands to the shoulders. Then, placing his legs along the bench in the sitting position, he proceeded to press the bar twice overhead—once from the chest and once from behind the neck. Lowering the bar, after the second overhead press, to the chest, Hermann then hooked his feet under the bench (he was still in the sitting position with legs outstretched in