

Superlative pencils

Ever higher, faster, further: new records are set all the time. And yet they always succeed in fascinating people and stimulating discussion. Here are a few records from the world of the pencil.



The world's oldest pencil

This unusual object was found among the rafters of a 17th-century house in the course of renovations. A carpenter had evidently left it there by mistake, and it had probably remained unnoticed for three centuries. The pencil is made of two pieces of lime (linden) wood, with a piece of pure graphite sandwiched between them, and bears signs of use that confirm its great age. The oldest surviving example of a wood-cased pencil anywhere in the world, it is now preserved in the Faber-Castell archive.

Pencils were a relatively new invention when this one was made. If the story is to be believed, shepherds in Cumberland stumbled on a deposit of graphite which was mistakenly believed to be lead ore. The soft “lead glance” proved much better for writing and drawing than hard metallic lead, and more practical than quill and ink, so its use spread rapidly. Originally, sticks of graphite were wrapped in leather or paper, or wound with cord. Later they were placed in holders of wood or metal to protect them. Then people hit on the idea of encasing them completely in glued wood.

So the pencil was born, and with it the trade of pencil-maker.



The world's largest pencil

It took 7029 man-hours to produce the largest pencil in the world – a giant version of the famous hexagonal green Castell 9000. One half of the wood casing was built up, layer by layer, from native Malaysian timber. Then the lead, 150 mm in diameter and weighing 600 kilos, was lowered into a groove and an identical second half placed on top. The polymer lead had previously been manufactured in Germany and shipped to Malaysia. The pencil now stands on end – protected from the elements by a glass construction – next to the lobby of the Faber-Castell building in Subang Jaya, Malaysia.



The world's smallest pencil

The smallest pencil in the world is 17.5 mm short and about 3 mm thin. Count von Faber-Castell had this miniature pencil (a tenth as long as normal) specially made from North American spruce as an appropriate gift on the occasion of the unveiling of the world's largest pencil. It then travelled with him half way round the globe to Malaysia. The little midget was so much admired that it was decided to produce a limited edition of 50 in time for Christmas. The pencils have a real graphite lead 0.5 mm in diameter, but if the owners want to use them for writing they will probably need a pair of tweezers!



The world's most expensive pencil

It is always a delightful challenge to improve a quality product still further and gain some unique nuances in the process. When gold is alloyed with palladium (one of the platinum metals), the result is white gold. This material reveals its full splendour in combination with the natural hue of the pocket pencil. The magnum-sized cap made of solid white gold is crowned by three fine-quality diamonds. These are 0.05 to 0.06 carats in size and unusually brilliant.

This was a limited edition of 99 world-wide.

Further information:

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