

149 is 50

The 50-year evolution of the archetypal power pen, the Montblanc No. 149, is detailed in this two-part series.



Montblanc No. 149, ca. 1952, the introductory year. From the Joe Engel collection.

The Montblanc 149 has become an icon, a prototypical writing instrument of the age. One sees the big, black cigar-shaped fountain pen on desks, in pockets, in the hands of power brokers. Its image represents prestige, power and luxury yet its essential identity, that of a writer, remains. The 149 did not achieve universal recognition just because of its size and beauty. It began life 50 years ago, matured and remains famous as a great writer.

More than 75 years ago, the Parker Duofold Big Red was such a departure from the norm that it attracted attention far beyond the circles of those who could afford its \$7.50 price tag in 1925. In the 1940s and 1950s, the legendary Parker 51 was considered the perfect marriage of form and function and became yet another writing instrument to achieve iconic status. Like its predecessors in the pen industry that achieved recognition even among those who neither owned nor used them, the 149 has become more than the sum of its precision components.

The first-year 149, circa 1952, has become one of the most prized of all Montblanc models. Just 10 years ago, the 149 was ignored by many classic fountain pen collectors;

older 149s were offered at reasonable prices. The rage then was big orange 1950s Danish Montblancs with Number 6 nibs or other older orange German Montblancs with Number 25, 30, 35 or the occasional huge Number 40 nib. Even pens with small Number 2 or Number 4 nibs in red elicited more passionate responses than older 149s.

During the Wall Street wave of the early 1980s and continuing through the enormous economic expansion of the 1990s, the 149 Diplomat gained popularity not only among those seeking a status symbol but also among writers and collectors who had previously collected only classic pens. They realized what an elegant, comfortable and functional fountain pen it was. Call it what you will—149, Diplomat, Masterpiece, Meisterstück, the Hog or the Telephone Pole. Its style, quality and history merit the 149's lofty position, and its performance confirms the superlatives that accompany descriptions of this great pen.

I have owned and studied examples of early 149s and noted a number of changes over the years. My collection once held 39 Montblanc 149s—two broad, two stub, five medium, 11 fine and 19 extra fine—and about a half dozen

parts pens. Based on pens in my own as well as other collections, plus resources in my possession and those sent me by the Montblanc Archives in Hamburg, I offer some personal observations on the evolution of the 149.

Additionally, conversations with authorities Arthur Twydle, Montblanc's former chief repairman in the UK and currently director of the Pen Museum in Hull, England, and Dr. Osman Sumer, a Montblanc dealer and authority in Hamburg, Germany, have provided priceless information.

The 149 of 1952 is not the 149 of today. Nearly every component has undergone change. Slight modifications

the filler cone. Montblanc, like Waterman, employed a three-digit numbering system. The first number indicated the pen's pedigree—1 for Meisterstück-Masterpiece or highest quality, 2 for middle range and 3 for student. On early Montblancs, through 1947, the middle number designated the filling system—0 for safety eyedropper filler, 2 for push or button filler and 3 for piston filler. However, by 1948, when the 140 series was introduced, the center number's significance had been abandoned. There were still button fillers with rubber bladders being produced, but they seemed to have an arbitrary middle number. In 1952, when



left to right—Mint condition No. 149 transitional model with nib style of late '70s and other components from early '80s; No. 149 of the late '60s with wide nib shoulders and wide, flat cone band; No. 149 of late '50s or early '60s with tapered nib and thin, rounded cone band.

from decade to decade created a pen that satisfied consumer needs while maintaining a corporate vision. Assign yourself a treasure hunt. Place two Diplomats side by side. Get a good jeweler's loupe if your eyes, like mine, are around the same age as the 149. As you methodically study each part of each pen, some surprises await you.

Montblanc's Numbering System

On the original Diplomat, 149 was heat stamped on

the largest of the series, the 149, was introduced, the middle number remained non-descriptive. The third digit shows the nib size. Although Montblanc produced nibs from the popularly named baby, Number 00, to the giant Number 9, the standard sizes were 2, 4, 6 and 8. The Number 9 nib was available only in the Meisterstück range.

The Filler Cone and Filler Plate

At the southernmost point of the 149 is a turning

knob known in the German pen industry as the filler cone. It is the gripping portion of a piston filler mechanism. On the 149 and the entire 140 series, this cone is permanently attached. On some smaller Montblancs of the 1950s, notably the 240 series, it was actually a false cap that was completely removable revealing a small, ribbed turning knob. Turning this knob engaged the piston filler. The 149's permanent filler cone is smooth and tapered, slightly rounded at its pinnacle.

Continuing northward on the 149, stop at the first metal encountered. This band, called the filler plate or filler ring, is thin and rounded on the original 149. Study it closely at the edge of the barrel; there is a clear convex contour to this piece of metal. It resembles a thin washer and is, in fact, the border between the barrel proper (later called the barrel tube) and the filler cone. Run a finger along the filler plate when the piston is engaged and the cone is at its greatest distance from the barrel. The ring really is a ring—rounded, not a flat-edged washer as on later models. It serves as the border between cone and barrel, reinforcing the junction so that there is added strength and not simply cel-

luloid closing against celluloid. It is also a decorative feature appearing on the entire 140 series from its first appearance. Devotees of older Montblanc models will note that the immediate predecessor on the Meisterstück luxury line, the 130 series in sizes 2, 4, 6, 8, and 9, lacked such a filler plate, as did the earlier luxury push button 120 series. On the 130 series, the ebonite turning cone closed against the celluloid barrel. The filler ring continued to be used on later transitional 149 models. After the 1959 switch from celluloid to plastic, the thin rounded band remained. The change to the wider, flush band between filler cone and barrel seems to have been made in the 1960s and remains today.

The Barrel

The writing end of the barrel presents an interesting contrast between older and newer 149s. The barrel of the 149 was the same size as its luxury predecessor, the 139, but both are slightly smaller than current production 149s. The celluloid barrel and cap of the original 149 have a distinctive red tint, especially when held to a strong light source.

Prior to 1985, the barrel tube was a single unit, with

YARD·O·LED

SOLID SILVER WRITING INSTRUMENTS
HANDCRAFTED IN ENGLAND

Emperor

THE DISTINCTIVE
NEW RESIN RANGE
EMBELLISHED WITH
STERLING SILVER.

AVAILABLE SOON

PLEASE CALL 1800 345 6798

the exception of the filler cone. A raised lip protrudes slightly from the barrel. Just below the gripping area, although it is not a separate section, the barrel has an ink view window with clearly defined vertical panes that extend completely around the barrel's circumference. On some models they are almost totally faded, but even on the most ambered pen there will probably be a hint of the panes.

After 1985, the barrel was manufactured in two parts with the junction just above the ink view window. On a newer 149, a clear line is visible just above the ink view and immediately below the barrel's outer threads where the two parts meet. The separate section on more recent models has clear plastic threads and a bayonet snap lock that are internal and invisible except in the assembly room or the operating room during repairs. Once closed and properly sealed, the joint should prove air and watertight.

During periodic maintenance, perhaps every decade or so, the section can be removed and new sealant applied. Authorized Montblanc repairmen generally prefer the pink "bubble-gum" sealant, a quick-drying paste that remains secure for long periods. Neglect of the pen, however, seems

to reduce its effectiveness. Complaints about leaking sections by users of newer 149s should be followed with an inquiry as to how long the pen has been lying unused in a desk drawer. Leaking sections, though rare, usually occur after the pen has spent years empty in the box or, more dangerous indeed, left with ink inside. Mixing inks within the pen or even in bottles can be dangerous for piston fillers like the 149. According to one Montblanc dealer, the inside of the barrel can become pitted and the sealant can deteriorate from chemical interactions by different ink types. Seriously neglected 149s may need the section removed from the barrel; resealing or replacing the barrel is sometimes necessary. Disassembling, sealing, and reassembling the barrel is fairly simple surgery, although it should only be attempted by an authorized Montblanc repairman using the proper tools and sealant.

The Filling System

The filling mechanism on early 149s is the same on the entire 140 series and also the 130 series from 1939-52. The filler is a double piston or telescope design that allows one

NETTUNO
1911

LORENZO STOMA & PARTNERS

Dolphin

FIRMA s.r.l.
Via S. Bernardino, 102 - 24126 Bergamo (Italy)
tel. (+39) 035.31.19.45 - fax (+39) 035.31.51.65
e-mail: firmasrl@tiscalinet.it

YAFFA

piston to collapse over the other, thus creating a larger ink chamber than in a similarly sized pen with a traditional single spindle piston mechanism. If you hold the barrel of a celluloid 149 to the light it is possible to see the movement of the pistons. Turning the filler cone to open or close, one feels the true double or telescopic piston. Like a telescope with larger sections closing upon smaller sections, the 149's first gear is smaller, allowing the second to fit over it in the retreat position when the ink chamber is fully loaded.

Conversely, when the plunger head advances at the fore end of the piston, it emerges from over the rear piston. In this position, the air has been expelled. A vacuum has been created, and the pen is ready to be filled.

The filler cone, attached to the spindle's rear end, turns easily and then with smooth resistance as the pistons extend first quickly with almost no tension, then more slowly with considerable resistance. This is tension, not piston damage. As the filler cone moves backwards away from the barrel, the spindle housing is visible. On the double-gear celluloid 149, this housing is a white metal tube concluding in the cone and extending into the barrel base. A plastic spindle and housing existed from the late 1950s until 1990 when a brass housing was introduced.

The Cap

With so many components, the Diplomat's cap contains several features unique to the early 149. Fully disassembled (to be done only by professionals), the early cap has two celluloid and four metal components. Like the barrel, the celluloid cap is slightly smaller than the cap on later models. Most noticeable, and perhaps the difference mentioned most frequently among collectors, are the two thin cap bands. Surrounding the wide central cap band are two thin sterling silver bands, which are gold filled on later models. The wide band, sometimes called the girdle, has Montblanc engraved on it in stylized block letters. The letter style has changed

several times over the years, sometimes deeply etched and at other times cut with a more shallow recess. Early wide central cap bands are not marked 149 as are current models.

After the company name is one of three model designations—Masterpiece, Meisterstück or Chef d'Oeuvre. The silver band caps with Masterpiece are more common than the German or French designations. One can assume that by the late 1950s, when the sterling cap rings were abandoned in favor of gold-filled rings, there was also a domestic market for the 149, thus the Meisterstück marking, English, German and French advertise-



No. 149 pens of the 1970s showing the four standard nib grades: (left to right) broad, medium, fine and extra-fine.

ments indicate that the luxury 140 line was initially directed at overseas consumers as a means of acquiring hard currency for Germany in the immediate post-war years. This explains the English name Masterpiece used for British Commonwealth and North American consumers, and the much less common French Chef d'Oeuvre, which is rare throughout Europe. I have seen only one of these French market 149s in over 20 years of collecting pens on three continents. It was owned by a well known Parisian collector and disappeared almost immediately after being offered.

At the cap tube's top is a small celluloid or plastic nipple that is threaded and screws into a recess in the underside of the cap top, or crown. The nipple was celluloid from 1952 until approximately 1959 then plastic until about 1985. The clip, placed over the nipple, fits perfectly around a raised tier. The crown with its renowned "white star," representing the snow-capped peak of Mont Blanc, screws onto this nipple to hold the clip in place. From 1985 onward, the cap tube has had a center hole in this tier. A small brass, flat-end single-slotted screw goes through the hole from the inside and protrudes above the tier to approximately the same height as the integral celluloid protrusion on early models. A clear plastic washer fits between the screw head and the inner cap top. The crown on newer models has a threaded brass-lined receptacle for the screw. Since 1985, the 149 has had a cap-to-crown configuration of metal to metal, holding the plastic components together, thus assuring considerable strength in the union. I have seen older

discarded 149 caps with broken nipples, but on recent models the nipples have been replaced by a brass screw. Broken caps since 1985 are rare.

The Clip

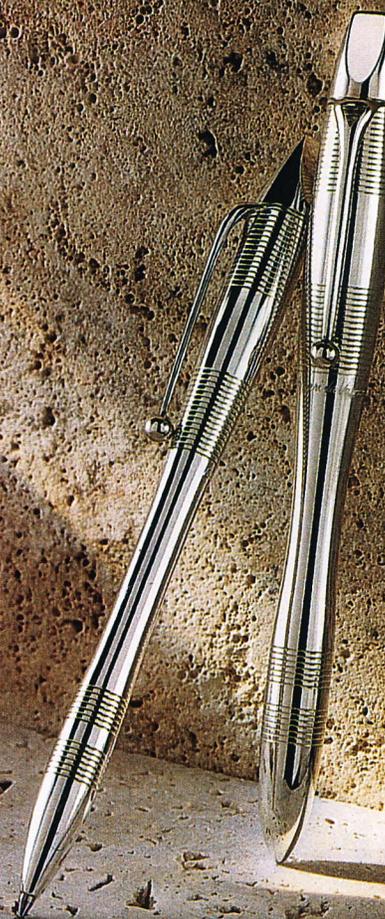
The cap clip is the only metal part of the early 149 that can be separated from the barrel or cap. Early celluloid models had a short center hump along the top of the clip with the clip ring engraved with "W. Germany." Although clips may have been replaced, the majority of celluloid 149s I have seen bear this demarcation. The clip has evolved in the past 50 years, and there have been at least four other styles after the original short hump. There is a clip with a long center hump also engraved "W. Germany." Some pre-1990 149s are marked simply "Germany," with either a long or a short hump. This is unusual because the two clips pre-date the reunification of the Federal Republic (West) and the Democratic Republic (East). Finally, there is a 1960-1970s 149 with the long center hump and the clip ring marked "Montblanc - Made in Germany." Since about 1990, the clips have carried a letter-numeral identification code said to be primarily for detection of smuggled gray market, or untaxed and illegal, Montblanc pens. In addition to their code, these pens have the words "Germany" or "W. Germany." I have seen one 149 clip ring marked "Montblanc metal - Germany." «

In the next issue, an in-depth look at the writing end of the Montblanc 149—two collars, seven feeds and 12 nibs. Also, who is it that clearly covets the 149 these days?

Ferrari da Varese

Luxury

writing instruments



Ferrari da Varese srl

Tel. +39-0332-261589

Fax +39-0332-261138

ferraridavarese.com

info@ferraridavarese.com

149 is 50

Part 2

The first installment of this two-part article detailed 50 years of Montblanc 149 production—its beginnings and the evolution of the numbering system, filler cone and plate, filling system, barrel, cap and clip. The journey concludes with a look at the writing end of the 149 and some expert opinions about the characteristics that make the Montblanc 149 a popular classic.



Variations on Montblanc 149 barrel, nib and feed, 1960s–1980s. Shown with packing tubes, ca. 1990s.

At the writing end of the pen, one finds the collar, the feed and the nib. Over the years, I have identified two collars, seven feeds and 12 different nibs.

The Collar

The collar, a plastic band that holds the nib against the feed, was completely recessed within the barrel until 1985. Early Diplomats have a slight depression in the barrel end around the nib base or tail. A pair of tiny slots 180 degrees apart fit a special 149 nib tool for inserting and removing the collar. Set snugly within the collar are the nib and feed. From 1952 until 1985 a three-part nib unit—collar, feed and nib—was assembled outside of the pen but installed and removed as a unit. With the appearance of the two-piece barrel in 1985 came an overlapping collar. On these

models, the barrel lip is actually a separate piece; it's the wide outer edge of the collar. It is simple to detect because this collar lip is somewhat lighter than the barrel. This collar can also be removed with the 149 tool. Earlier 149s had the actual edge of the barrel as their barrel end lips.

Feed Me

The various 149 feeds represent a clear evolution of design in ebonite from 1952 to 1996 and a serious focus on simplicity of replacement in the two plastic feeds made since 1990. The original 149 had a curved, recessed feed commonly called the “ski slope.” This elegant feed, with its smooth curves and central grooves, was used on the entire 140 series, as well as on the moderate-range 240 series from the 1950s. With internal and external combs, this feed is

completely functional 50 years after it was introduced.

The next four feeds on the 149 more closely resemble traditional feeds on other high quality pens—large, somewhat protruding to extend the ink capacity of their many combs and made of the ideal feed material, ebonite or hard rubber.

The two feeds made between 1959 and 1972 were quite similar. The internal ink channel runs the entire length of the feed, and each has an extensive network of side combs. When turned to their undersides, a clear difference is discernible in the portion visible when the feed and nib are set securely into the pen—a pair of center ink channels act as added insurance against overflow. On the earlier model the channel reached the whole length of the feed. On the later model, the pair of channels stops on the angled face just above the feed's rounded shank.

Like the previous pair of similar feeds, the next two can also be considered a pair, so similar are they except for a single, though significant, design feature. These two feeds have identical ink channels, side and under grooves, and both have a plain face without grooves or channels. Turn the two feeds sideways, and it is easy to see that the 1972–1981 model has a solid profile, while the later 1981–1990 model has a clearly defined cut through the center of its face.

Turn the feed face up, press gently against the upper portion, and the feed's top taper will lift slightly. In theory, this feed would allow the writer to exert more pressure to achieve a calligraphic flourish without skipping. The feed and nib remain in contact because the feed moves with the nib, rather than the nib moving away from the feed and creating a tiny air space that breaks the capillary attraction between ink chamber and nib tip. This feed is sometimes called the “shark” because in profile it resembles an elongated face with its mouth about to open. The appearance of this feed in the very early 1980s—when many more consumers were unfamiliar with fountain pens and tended to exert more pressure on the nib than necessary—suggests one theory as to its design characteristics. In the early years of the first Reagan administration conspicuous consumption as a social phenomenon assured glorious and heralded diversions. It was at this time that Montblanc's popularity

began to skyrocket and bankers replaced poets and professors as the 149's primary consumers. Many of those first-time 149 users were unfamiliar with fountain pen use. Accustomed to ballpoint writing and its inherent pressure, 149 users of the early 1990s tended to press down hard and spring or separate the nib from the feed, resulting in poor performance. This was when the first complaints about 149 quality were heard, but it is necessary to consider the novice users when one listens to complaints about the writing qualities of this pen.

Montblanc's two most recent feeds, 1991–1996 and 1996 to the present, are plastic and well combed to prevent leaking. The 1991–96 feed has horizontal combs and is characterized by the ease of its insertion and removal.



Product brochures with filling instructions.

Repairmen no longer needed the nib tool to remove or install nib and feed; it simply slid into position. The feed fits into a thin slot cut into the inner wall of the collar. Despite the simplicity of insertion and removal, leaking almost never occurs. How good is the seal on this feed? When installing new feeds and nibs into half-filled pens of this vintage under strong magnification, I have seen ink run uphill through the nib slit between the tines. With the barrel down and nib up, the ink actually climbs to the nib tip. The silent installer can hear a definite “puff” when the nib and feed are set, as excess air is forced from the collar. That's a tight seal.

continued on page 26

Its Nibs

The following Montblanc 149 nibs have been seen and/or tested by the author. The dates—not necessarily exact, especially for early models, but fairly close from the 1970s on—are based on Montblanc advertisements, internal Montblanc communications, conversations with authorities and purchase dates of various 149s in the author's collection and other collections.



- 14C, three-tone, tapered shoulders, ca. 1952–59
- 14C, three-tone, broad shoulders, ca. 1960–72
- 18C, three-tone broad shoulders, for the European market, ca. 1952–59
- 14C, two-tone, narrow shoulders, ca. 1972–85
- 14C, two-tone, extra flexible, ca. 1960s–1970s
- 14K, two-tone, broad shoulders, ca. 1985–88
- 14K, two-tone, broad shoulders, cut-out tail, ca. 1988–90
- 14K, two-tone, narrow shoulders, ca. 1985–88
- 14K, two-tone, narrow shoulders, cut-out tail, ca. 1988–90
- 18K, two-tone, broad shoulders, ca. 1991–94
- 18K, three-tone, broad shoulders, ca. 1995–99, used on the Hemingway, shown above, before being used on regular production 149 models
- 18K, three-tone, narrow shoulders, cut-out tail, 1999 to present

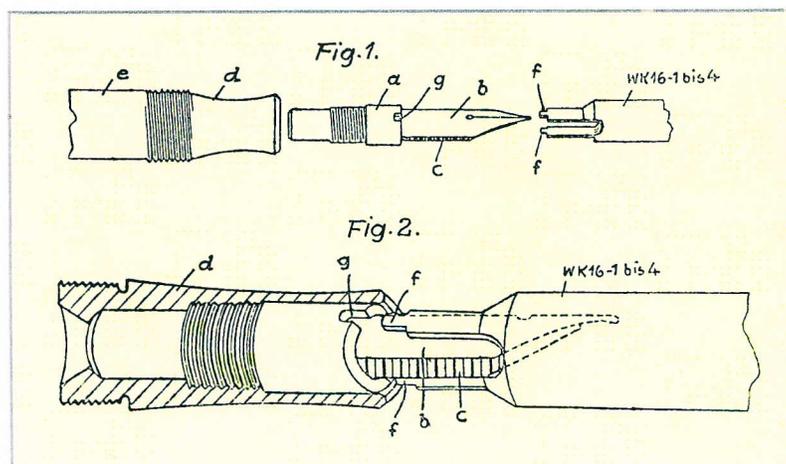
“Three-tone” indicates gold-platinum-gold, and “two-tone” indicates platinum on gold.

Montblanc's current feed, introduced on the Alexandre Dumas Writers Series pen and used on the 149 since 1996, has an interesting ridge near the bottom of its shaft. In profile, this feed has a curved cheek, reminiscent of the original ski slope feed. For the past five years, 149 nibs have had a small notch cut into their tails. The nib notch fits against the feed ridge to hold the nib in proper position. With this arrangement, there is no chance of the nib slipping off center. New users of fountain pens sometimes complain that their pens have sprung nibs, separated from the feed. This occasionally occurs direct from the factory, but such a situation is nearly impossible with the current feed.

The Nib

The nibs of the 149 are some of the line's most interesting features and important when considering writing comfort. Some very early 149s have nibs that pre-date the Diplomat's production. Between 1939 and 1952, the 139 was Montblanc's flagship model. Its nib was a large No. 9 and closely resembled the later 149 nib with its three-tone finish, gold-platinum-gold, the characteristic 4810 stamp and the capital *M* in the stylized star within the circle. Study this part of the nib under strong magnification. On all later 149 Meisterstück nibs, the background of the star area between the star and its encompassing circle is plain. Some early 149 nibs have an etched background with very fine lines angled from top right to lower left. This is actually a 139 nib, apparently used on the 149 until supplies were exhausted. Removed for inspection, the front tail of this nib is marked *L 139* or *25*. The *L 139* was the official designation of the pen and *25* was another name for the large No. 9 nib, even though the 139 and 149 nibs are considerably larger than the nib on the famed button-filled No. 25 fountain pen. An authentic 139 model should possess this etched background logo nib.

There are writing characteristics unique to each nib. My favorite 149 nib is the 14C extra flexible because it provides interesting flourishes even without calligraphic training. Next on my list of favorites is the 14C two-tone nib. The tines on this model are fairly long in comparison to the 14K model so it,



Montblanc instructions for removing nib, feed and collar, from 1958 repair manual.

too, provides a bit of flexibility. It is also a sentimental favorite—it's the nib style on the 149 I gave my wife as a wedding gift in 1980. Third among my favorites is the 14K two-tone in all four of its styles. These are the 149's last 14 karat nibs, and I prefer 14 karat nibs to 18 karat nibs. Their higher alloy content offers more flexibility in standard non-calligraphic nibs than does 18 karat gold.

The 18K three-tone, broad-shoulder nib is another noteworthy example of an exceptional 149 nib. Also known as the Hemingway nib, it appeared on Montblanc's first Writers Series limited edition pen, the Hemingway, today the world's most prized (and expensive) non-precious metal or maki-e limited edition fountain pen, based on comparisons of asking prices among collectors in North America, Europe and Japan. This nib is Montblanc's only limited edition nib in the Writers and Patron of the Arts series that did not have some special design related to the writer or patron or was unique in some other respect to the limited edition pen. In fact, it is a special nib because, at the time of the Hemingway's release, the 149 still had a two-tone 18K nib. It was approximately four years later that the standard 149 nib became available as a three-tone, gold-platinum-gold, nib in regular production.

Who Buys These Things?

Years ago, when I traded a Parker Vacumatic Senior Maxima with a deeply cracked section for a very early 149, a well known US dealer/collector said jokingly that he was robbing me in the trade. "No, this is a very old Montblanc," I responded and handed it back to him. Still holding the seriously damaged Vacumatic, he uncapped and examined the 149 closely. "You're wrong," he said, "this is a new pen. I see these all the time." He returned the 149 to me. We shook on the deal, each happy and each convinced he'd gotten the better deal.

Presently, the word on the street regarding Montblanc 149s is "love 'em or hate 'em." A popular website offers visitors a Montblanc survey and comments on the famed 149. Has the 149 fallen victim to its own popularity? This may be the case to some extent. Because it is a prestige fountain pen, it is sometimes purchased by well heeled consumers who have no idea how to care for a luxury fountain pen. Accustomed to bearing down hard with a ballpoint, these users frequently damage their fountain pens on initial use. Unaware that his or her writing style has caused the dam-

age, the new owner naturally blames the pen. Often these pens are left filled and unused for long periods of time, resulting in a severely clogged ink channel. One late 1980s model I operated on still had a completely stained ink view after three days of soaking. Once disassembled, the feed required further extensive soaking and scrubbing. When I asked the owner about his writing habits, he replied that the 149 was a gift and didn't really suit his daily writing so he'd left it filled in his desk until he needed it. Its ink had completely evaporated, and crystalized pigment had sealed the ink chamber and veins of the feed.

What about pens that are not misused, pens that come from the factory and don't perform to the customer's satisfaction? Sadly, this does occur, but it's certainly not a problem unique to high-end fountain pens. I have had inexpensive fountain pens fail to write until I reset the nib and feed. Likewise, I have owned several European models selling at about twice the price of a 149 that had sprung, crooked or bent (yes, damaged) nibs upon my initial inspection—they left the factory in that condition. Another explanation of problems associated with 149s is that we are a far less patient society than we were during the Golden Age of fountain pens. A fountain pen is not an electronic gadget. It is a precision instrument requiring concentration and commitment for maximum performance.

What do dealers, collectors, and repairmen say about the 149? Regina Martini of r.martini mailorder in Germany says the older 149 is much sought after by European collectors. While the current 149 remains popular, it has competition from many other models of equal or greater quality and expense.

Yoshimiitsu Sunakawa of Juzen-sha Pen Shop in Tokyo loves the 149. He says the older 149s are among the most prized fountain pens in all of Asia. The current production 149 is very popular among his customers, but some customers mention its weight since the factory returned to using a metal piston filling system in 1991. Overall, Sunakawa praises the 149, noting that piston fillers are very popular in Japan.

Steve Weiderlight of Fountain Pen Hospital in New York City has been selling the 149 for nearly 40 years. When it premiered in the US in the early 1960s, it sold for about \$35. That was a considerable sum, but the Parker 75 in sterling silver sold at the same time for \$25. Considering

the market just a few years earlier, the 149 sold in 1958 for the equivalent of \$22 in Europe. At the same time, the Parker 51 went for \$13.75, and a year later, the Sheaffer PFM sold for between \$10 and \$22. Comparatively, the 149 was not terribly expensive.

Weiderlight notes that from the 1960s to the 1980s, the 149 was the only oversize model on the market. There was almost universal customer satisfaction with the 149 in those days. In the 1960s and 1970s, the owner of a 149 probably had other smaller fountain pens, but none of the size and cachet of the Diplomat. That is one feature of the 149's popularity that has certainly changed. Now, the 149 owner has many large pens to choose from and probably owns several competitive models. In price, the 149 is now near the low end of luxury models, whereas 20 to 40 years ago, it was in a class almost by itself. Weiderlight says, "From the early 1960s until the 1980s, the 149 was *the* big pen. There weren't any others in that category. It was the biggest in status and quality."

Chuck Edwards of Fahrney's in Washington, DC, has seen hundreds of 149s during his career in the writing instruments industry. His customers still regard the 149 as a functional status symbol. He says, "Like the Burberry trench coat and the Rolex wristwatch, the Montblanc 149 is the pen many people aspire to own. For some people, it is worn rather than used. Since Montblanc returned to the 18K nib in 1991, it has become a more popular model." Edwards continues, "Mr. Fahrney began carrying them in the late 1960s or

early 1970s. The 149 has an excellent track record. It actually sells itself. It is asked for by customers, rather than being introduced by the sales staff. That's how popular it

has become. Old-timers still use them. It's a traditional pen."

We love the 149, not because it's the current prestige pen or because of its great history, but because it is a truly comfortable, high-performance fountain pen. The casual user who acquires this pen in order to impress clients and colleagues, then leaves the pen half full in a box for months or tosses it into his desk tray along with keys and coins will soon have a disappointing, ill-performing pen. Leave factory oil in a Ferrari, and the machine will moan in a very few months. Properly cared for, a 149 will last a lifetime. I received my first 149 in 1979. Dropped a couple of times, it needed a new feed in the mid-1980s. It still performs brilliantly. I have 149s from the early 1960s that write wonderfully. A couple have tight pistons that eventually will wear out. A repairman can disassemble and lubricate the mechanism, but eventually the thin, white plastic spindle will break. That's a given, but I'm impressed with any 40-year-old plastic still performing well.

I asked Chuck Edwards, as the dean of North American Montblanc repairmen, for his views on 149 repairs. He says, "I do more cleaning than repairing, much more maintenance over repair." His advice? "To prevent problems, use them," he says. "The best thing is to use your 149." I couldn't agree more. «



top—Montblanc 1955 price guide showing, left to right, models 149, 146, 144 and 142. Only the 149 is shown with a "4810" nib.
above—Montblanc ink bottles. Bottle on the left, ca. 1970s, is considered one of the best designed of all time; "light bulb" bottle on right, ca. 1980s.