

No Time Like The Present

Gear Technology's bimonthly aberration — gear trivia, humor, weirdness and oddments for the edification and amusement of our readers. Contributions are welcome.

There's nothing like a new year—with the possible exception of birthdays ending in zero—to remind one of the passage of time. Keeping track of time has always been part of the brief of the gear engineer. One of the earliest gear assemblies is the remains of the Antikythera machine, a calendar/calculator dating from the first century B.C. Until the industrial revolution, clock makers and gear designers were usually the same people.

Therefore, in the interest of keeping our readers in touch with their professional roots, we bring you the following observations about time.

It Flies When You're Having Fun

Time is both relative and a measurable commodity. You'd be amazed how much you can get done in a given amount of time if you put your mind to it. According to Stuart A. Sandow (*Durations*, New York Times Books, 1977):

- Light can travel 30 centimeters in a billionth of a second.
- In .000024 seconds, a stick of dynamite will detonate.
- A car's air bag will inflate in .04 seconds.

- The same car travelling at 30 mph will go 44' in one second.

- At the Coke bottling plant, 340 16-oz. bottles are filled every minute.

- In one hour, you can de-ice 10 miles of a two-lane road by spreading rock salt from a truck.

- In one day, 100 photographers shot 60,000 pictures for the *Life* magazine bicentennial edition.

- It takes one year to build a Steinway grand piano—or for a broken femur to mend.

We Don't Want To Pressure You, But . . .

There are other ways to measure time, of course. You can ask how much you've accomplished in the time you've had. Jeremy Baker in *Tolstoy's Bicycle* (St. Martin's Press, 1982) reminds us that:

- Mozart gave his first European concert tour when he was 6; at the same age Shirley Temple was earning \$1,250 a week (1934 dollars).

- At 13, John Quincy Adams was secretary to the U.S. minister to Russia in St. Petersburg;

- Sixteen-year-old Ivan (later to be known as "The Terrible,") was crowned Czar; at the same age, Leonardo da

Vinci became an apprentice in the workshop of Andrea del Verrochio;

- At 17, George Washington was the county surveyor of Culpepper, VA;

- At 20, Guglielmo Marconi began his first experiments in radio transmission. He took out his first patent at 22 and started his own radio company at 23.

- Edwin Land dropped out of Harvard at 21. Two years later he invented the Polaroid.

- At 21, Thomas J. Watson, Sr., hired on at National Cash Register, and Steve Jobs, with help from Stephen Wozniak, built the first Apple computer in his garage.

On the Other Hand . . .

- Leo Tolstoy took his first bicycle lesson at 67; Queen Victoria began lessons in Hindustani at the same age.

- Ginger Rogers, 68, did three weeks of shows with the Rockettes; Nicolas Copernicus was also 68 when he published *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, thus laying the foundations for modern astronomy;

- At 71 John Houseman won his first Oscar for "The Paper Chase";

- At 80 Konrad Adenauer (Germany), Eamon DeValera (Ireland), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Marshal Tito (Yugoslavia), General Franco (Spain) and John Diefenbaker (Canada) were all heads of state.

- Conductor Leopold Stokowski, 94, signed a 6-year recording contract;

- Adolf Zukor, 100, was appointed Honorary Chairman of the Board of Paramount Pictures.

And now our time—and space—are just about up. All that's left is for us to wish all of you a Happy New Year. ☉



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