

# Why do you like slide rules?

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I am sure most of us collectors have at some point been asked the question “Why do you collect slide rules?”. However, the question that should be asked is “Why do you like slide rules?”, because this is usually the question we actually answer. Even if we have never been asked, we have probably asked ourselves at least once (perhaps phrased as “Why have I got so many of these?” or “Why am I doing this?”). The important thing here is not why you ‘collect’ certain kinds of slide rules (types, manufacturers, periods or whatever), but why slide rules in particular, what is it about them?

There will be many answers, all more or less pertinent to ourselves - tactility, design, complexity, simplicity, diversity, ease of use, nostalgia, their place and influence in history and science/engineering/design, and so on.

For me (I think, at least at the moment) the key things are their tactility and beauty, and their simple ingenuity and transparency. They can certainly be wonderful things to behold and fiddle with, and they can show, often at many levels of complexity, numerical relationships in an obvious and yet comprehensive way. This on a ridiculously simple mechanical device that really should have no business being able to do so; basically you set a ratio and you can miraculously see everything (and in style).

I don't know about using these things as a calculating aid, they should be used as standard in classroom maths lessons to show how maths works! How often do you enjoy casually fiddling with a slide rule and set it, not to solve a problem but more or less at random, just to see what it shows – and still be amazed at how much it does? I find myself doing this fairly often, perhaps because I came to slide rules after their demise and never really used/use them in anger. But even if you did/do, I would recommend that you take a step back and let yourself be amazed again once in a while.

But then again, you've got your own pet reasons for being beguiled haven't you - what are they?

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