

COMPREHENSION

The biggest house of cards, the longest tongue, and of course, the tallest man: these are among the thousands of records logged in the famous Guinness Book of Records. Created in 1955 after a debate concerning Europe's fastest game bird, what began as a marketing tool sold to pub landlords to promote Guinness, an Irish drink, became the bestselling copyright title of all time (a category that excludes books such as the Bible and the Koran). In time, the book would sell 120 million copies in over 100 countries—quite a leap from its humble beginnings. In its early years, the book set its sights on satisfying man's innate curiosity about the natural world around him. Its two principal fact finders, twins Norris and Ross McWhirter, scoured the globe to collect empirical facts. It was their task to find and document aspects of life that can be sensed or observed, things that can be quantified or measured. But not just any things. They were only interested in superlatives: the biggest and the best. It was during this period that some of the hallmark Guinness Records were documented, answering such questions as "What is the brightest star?" and "What is the biggest spider?" Once aware of the public's thirst for such knowledge, the book's authors began to branch out to cover increasingly obscure, little-known facts. They started documenting human achievements as well. A forerunner for reality television, the Guinness Book gave people a chance to become famous for accomplishing eccentric, often pointless tasks. Records were set in 1955 for consuming 24 raw eggs in 14 minutes and in 1981 for the fastest solving of a Rubik's Cube (which took a mere 38 seconds). In 1979 a man yodeled non-stop for ten and a quarter hours. In its latest incarnation, the book has found a new home on the internet. No longer restricted to the confines of physical paper, the Guinness World Records website contains seemingly innumerable facts concerning such topics as the most powerful combustion engine, or the world's longest train. What is striking, however, is that such facts are found sharing a page with the record of the heaviest train to be pulled with a beard. While there is no denying that each of these facts has its own, individual allure, the latter represents a significant deviation from the education-oriented facts of earlier editions. Perhaps there is useful knowledge to be gleaned regarding the tensile strength of a beard, but this seems to cater to an audience more interested in seeking entertainment than education. Originating as a simple bar book, the Guinness Book of Records has evolved over decades to provide insight into the full spectrum of modern life. And although one may be more likely now to learn about the widest human mouth than the highest number of casualties in a single battle of the Civil War, the Guinness World Records website offers a telling glimpse into the future of fact-finding and record-recording.

Questions

1) Which of the following statements would best serve as the headline for this passage?

- A. The encyclopedia of the extremes reflects the changing interests of modern society.
- B. A book of simple origins makes it to the top as sales total a staggering 120 million copies.
- C. Facts are often displayed in a boring, uninteresting manner, but not in the Guinness Book of Records.
- D. The Guinness World Records website proves itself a valuable resource for insight into the full spectrum of modern life.
- E. Where other books fall short, the index of superlative sciences never ceases to amaze.

2) According to the author, the most significant difference between older editions of the Guinness Book of Records and the new Guinness World Records website involves

- A. an end to the use of facts as a means to promote Guinness
- B. an overall increase in the total number of facts presented
- C. a move from fact-finding to the recording of achievements
- D. a shift in focus from educational to entertaining material
- E. a departure from book sales being limited to local pubs and bars

3) As used in paragraph 2, which is the best definition for empirical?

- A. natural
- B. derived from experience
- C. recordable
- D. excellent or unmatched
- E. convenient or handy

4) Based on its use in paragraph 2, which of the following best describes something that is superlative?

- A. Students give presentations about their favorite subjects for a grade. Amy Newhouse receives an 87% for her presentation, while Dustin Lincoln receives a 92%.
- B. Although sharks are significantly bigger and have razor-sharp teeth, dolphins are smarter and can therefore successfully evade attack.
- C. The lake holds a contest to see who can catch the biggest fish. Tommy wins, having caught a 6 lb. 5 oz. smallmouth bass.
- D. A man built an enormous house of cards. It took him 44 days and 218,792 individual playing

5) Using the passage as a guide, it can be inferred that the author most likely believes reality television to be

- A. corrupt
- B. absurd
- C. idiotic
- D. invaluable
- E. shallow