



Assorted Fountain Pens & Inks

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Jinhao x450 & Pelikan 4001 Turquoise

Pen: Jinhao x450

Based in China, Jinhao produces inexpensive pens that are easy to dismiss as cheap and undesirable. Personal biases against China—and there are myriad

reasons to hold these biases—

aside, Jinhao

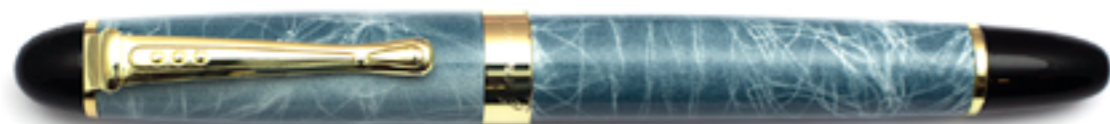
fountain pens are popular with beginners looking for an entry into the fountain pen hobby that doesn't break the bank.

While the Jinhao 250, often available in cheap packs of four, features a cheap plastic grip and a fine nib, the x450 is available with a medium nib, and its grip is made from higher-value plastic with rifled recesses, forcing beginners into the (arguably) correct way to hold the pen for the best writing experience. After months of moderate use, however, one should expect the black paint covering the grip to rub and flake off.

With its metal body, the x450 is slightly heavier than its x750 cousin and much heavier than Jinhao's entry-level 250. From weight alone, one would imagine the x450 to be at least thrice its asking price. Writers preferring a heavier pen won't find a satisfying alternative in the same price range. That said, the x450 does have a major weak point.

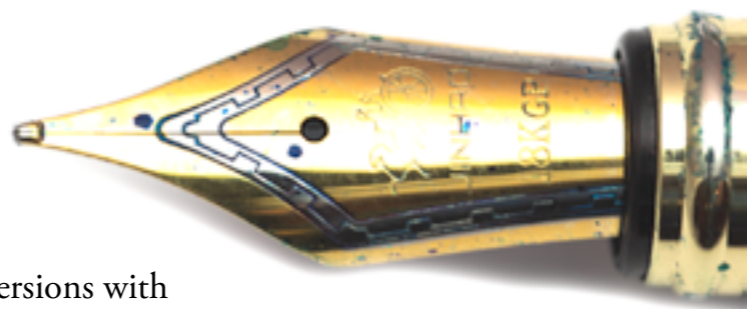
Jinhao's quality control in terms of nibs is shaky at best. In my experience, Jinhao nibs are an all-or-nothing gamble: if your pen writes well, it writes better than any pen in its price range. If it doesn't, the nib requires more

tuning than beginners (at whom this pen is indubitably targeted) are often comfortable with. Alternatively, the #6-size nib can be replaced with an individually purchased nib, such as #6 nibs from German manufacturers



JoWo (Berlin) or Bock (Heidelberg) or, in the United States, a Goulet nib. These nibs alone will be more expensive than the pen itself. However, pen and nib combined are still competitive, especially if one likes the design and prefers higher-weight pens.

The Jinhao x450 retails for less than € 10.- and includes a standard international converter for use with bottled ink. A plethora of finishes and colours is available, ranging from the blue clouds pictured here over black-and-red swirls to glossy monocoloured



versions with additional rifling patterns on the barrel.

Ink: Pelikan 4001 Turquoise

Pelikan's 4001 range can be considered a bread-and-butter range of saturated inks in classic colours. The turquoise variant is very saturated with slight shading depending on the nib and paper used. In very wet pens and on sheen-prone paper, it can develop a slight violet sheen.

In the x450's medium nib, 4001 Turquoise feels very wet and juicy, with a drying time to go along with this impression. This pen-and-ink combination is certainly not a prime choice for quick notetaking.

A 30-ml bottle of 4001 Turquoise retails at € 4.70. At 16 cents per millilitre, it's slightly more expensive than Diamine inks but still cheap compared to higher-end ranges like Pelikan's own Edelstein (26 cents per millilitre) and Graf von Faber-Castell (39 cents per millilitre).



The quick brown fox
jumps over the lazy dog.

Lamy Studio

& Graf von Faber-Castell Olive Green

Pen: Lamy Studio

Known for its entry-level Safari and Al-Star models, German-based Lamy is often mainly seen as a manufacturer of school supplies by its fellow Germans. Elsewhere, Lamy is loved



by fountain

pen users who value the unique shapes of their pens' caps and clips and the handy ink window. To the surprise of some, not all Lamy models display these features.

Lamy's high-level pen, the Lamy 2000, has almost nothing in common visually with Safari and Al-Star pens. Situated closer to the entry-level price range, the Lamy Studio might just be the most interesting model, both visually and performance-wise. Close to a classic cigar shape, albeit not quite the same, the Lamy Studio is a sleek and slender pen with an unusual twist—literally. Its clip twists from a horizontal to a vertical orientation about halfway down its length.

The medium nib my model is equipped with is buttery smooth and highly reliable. I haven't experienced a single instance of hard starting, skipping or drying out, even after days without using the pen. The cap closes with a satisfying little snap and does appear to seal the nib off quite well.

The Lamy Studio's availability and price vary on account of the special edition colours available. The stainless-steel version with a rubberised grip requires prospective buyers

to put down € 39.-, whereas the Imperial Blue version pictured here asks for € 45.- and features a more slippery metal grip. A Piano Black version is available for a whopping € 119.-.

In contrast to other pens in similar price ranges, the Lamy Studio does not come with a converter. It takes proprietary Lamy cartridges and converters and won't work with a standard international converter.



Ink: Graf von Faber-Castell Olive Green

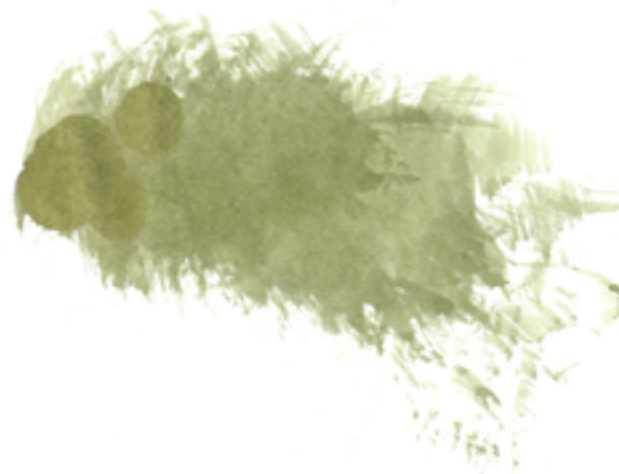
The pens, inks and notebooks of Faber-Castell's "Graf von Faber-Castell" line are premium products. This Olive Green ink is the most expensive in my collection, setting me back € 29.- for 75 ml of ink, a per-millilitre price of € 0.39. In exchange, I received a gorgeous desaturated ink with quite some shading.

Olive Green is on the drier side, somewhat alleviated by the Lamy Studio's juicy M-nib.

It behaves very well, as already discussed above in the section dealing with the Studio's writing performance. In wetter pens, Olive Green can get somewhat darker, but it always stays firmly located in the realm of less saturated inks. I've not experienced any sheen on any paper.

Perhaps this ink's specific shade can be closely approximated by mixing or watering down similar inks and running the risk of affecting their performance. Out of the box

(or rather, bottle), however, Olive Green offers a colour I haven't yet come across in any other manufacturers' lines.



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Twsbi Eco

& Robert Oster Cherry Blossom

Pen: TWSBI Eco

Based in Taiwan, TWSBI offers entry-level demonstrator pens for a slightly higher price than other manufacturers' entry-level segments. Its Eco and Eco T lines, excluding



special editions with rose gold adornments, cost between € 30.- and € 40.- and are available in a range of colours, both opaque and transparent. Most colours are limited runs, so TWSBI definitely plans its strategy with collectors in mind.

This pastel pink version is a past limited edition that, to my knowledge, is not being produced any longer. I was only able to snatch up a fine-nibbed version of this particular colour; my preferred medium was already sold out everywhere and even removed from most stores' "temporarily out of stock" sections—for a lack of the "temporarily" qualifier, most likely.

Across an embarrassing number of pens, I have never experienced any difficulties with TWSBI nibs. This fine nib does have a bit too much feedback for my tastes, but there are many penpeople who like this kind of writing experience.

The transparent plastic of the barrel, whilst interpreted as a sign of cheapness and lack of class by some, is sturdy and weighty. TWSBI Ecos can withstand some abuse, at least now that rumoured cracking issues have apparently

been solved and are an artifact of the past. The Eco will most certainly never be the favourite pen of anybody with a preference for business-like or nobility-looking pens, but its writing performance is sublime, and connoisseurs of

popping colours and pastels alike will love the design—if they don't mind the hexagonal (Eco) or triagonal (Eco T) design.



Ink: Robert Oster Cherry Blossom

Perfectly in line with the subdued, pastel nature of the pen I use it in, Robert Oster's Cherry Blossom presents itself in a subdued, unassuming, muted manner. Larger areas of swabs and writing with wetter nibs can certainly produce a more saturated result, whereas my fine Eco nib preserves the understated nature with just a hint of muddiness.

The ink feels quite dry to me, although that could be a result of the F-nib I use it in. Or perhaps it's a statement by Robert Oster, based in Australia: "Have some Australian dryness over there. You're welcome!"

At about € 14.- for a 50-ml bottle of Cherry Blossom, the ink is neither on the cheap nor on the expensive end of the spectrum. Considering that I bought it in Europe and it's manufactured in Australia, its € 0.27 per ml price tag compares favourably to a bottle of Pelikan Edelstein at € 0.26, produced in the very country I live in.



*The quick brown fox
jumps over the lazy dog.*

Twsbi Diamond 580 Smoke & Rose Gold 2 & Pelikan Edelstein Mandarin

Pen: TWSBI Diamond 580 S&RG II

One step up from the TWSBI Eco, the Diamond 580 series features metal parts where the Eco uses plastic but still remains a set of demonstrator



pens with transparent bodies and a clear view of the ink inside. Standard versions of the 580 with clear caps and single-coloured sections and adornments retail for about € 75.-, whereas the second iteration of the Smoke & Rose Gold model has an asking price of about € 110.-. For the premium, one receives an arguably more noble-looking pen with no changes in writing experience except for the grip (see info box below).

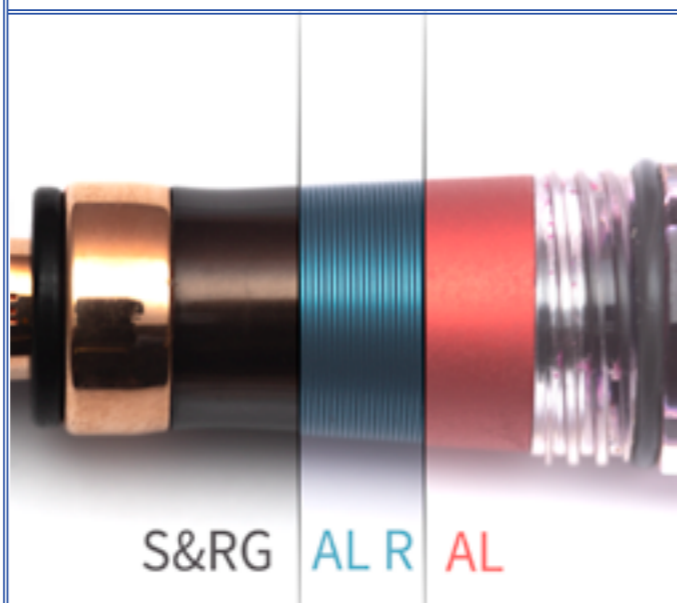
My model of the 580 is equipped with rose gold-plated stub nib that writes very similarly to TWSBI's standard steel stub nibs in the Eco and 580 ranges.

The angular tip provides some slight changes in line width depending

on the writing angle and direction, arguably improving even less experienced writers' handwriting. Whilst enhancing the look of printed characters, the nib truly excels in cursive writing—if one is capable of producing legible cursive in the first place (cursive writing sample not included for reasons).

580 Diamond Grip Versions

The Smoke & Rose Gold II's grip is made from plastic and, in my experience, more slippery than both the AL R and the AL versions of the Diamond 580. The AL's grip is smooth metal and works quite well, whereas the AL R has a rifled section providing the best grip—but also attracts dust and grime depending on how it is being used. Cleaning the grip with a toothbrush is recommended.



Ink: Pelikan Edelstein Mandarin

Unlike the 4001 line, Pelikan's Edelstein inks are premium products. This specific ink retails for about € 12.- for 50 ml of ink, a per-millilitre price of € 0.24. Its qualities in both colour and shading are comparable to Diamine's more affordable Blaze Orange, but Mandarin is on the drier side.

In large swabs, Mandarin appears less saturated than in actual writing.

There, its shading qualities present some strokes as highly saturated orange, some as paler and similar to the large-area swab.

In my experience, legibility can be an issue in drier, finer nibs. Mandarin shines in broad and stub nibs and does a good job in a medium nib.



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Pineider Avatar UR & Diamine Hope Pink

Pen: Pineider Avatar UR

Not only is Pineider an Italian company; it also managed to snatch designer Dante Del Vecchio from Visconti, their fellow Italian competitor, in 2016. Dante's design is very



much

apparent in the Avatar UR, which looks quite similar—albeit longer and thinner—

to Visconti's

Rembrandt, most notably the shiny, textured centre-band with the manufacturer's name. Unlike the Rembrandt, however, the Avatar UR's centre-band features the skyline of Florence, where the manufacturer is based. This metal carving gives the pen a

noble touch, certainly reflected in its price. Depending on colour and availability, the Avatar UR starts at € 85.- and goes up all the way to € 135.-.

Reviewers pointed out that earlier models of the Avatar with a medium nib put down

a finer line than expected. This has not only been resolved with more recent models—Pineider might have overshot in the other direction. Both Avatar URs I own, both with M-nibs, put down an incredibly wet

line. Waterman's Tender Purple, a medium purple ink with some brightness to it, comes out almost entirely black due to the Avatar's incredible wetness. Tuning the nib to be somewhat drier resulted in a green sheen to Tender Purple. Diamine's Hope Pink performs more accurately to expectations in the Avatar.

This pen features a magnetic snap cap that seals with a satisfying click. The magnet might be a bit weak for a shirt pocket carry, and it requires some maintenance. Too much condensate in the cap for too long opens the magnet up for rusting. Drying the inside

of the cap regularly is recommended.



Ink: Diamine Hope Pink

Of the several pink options Diamine provides, Hope Pink might just be the most vibrant and hot. Especially in wetter and broader nibs, this ink is highly saturated and flows perfectly. A tiny bit of shading—depending on the nib and paper used—gives it a playful air that doesn't jump out quite as much as a fully saturated, consistent hot pink.

Like all standard Diamine inks—excluding Shimmertastic inks and some sheening or store-exclusive inks—Hope Pink retails for € 4.50 for 30 millilitres (€ 0.15/ml) and € 9.- for 80 millilitres (€ 0.14/ml). The 80 ml bottle used here works well for filling all sorts of pens. With the 30 ml bottle and its thin opening, girthier pens will struggle as soon as the level of remaining ink shrinks.

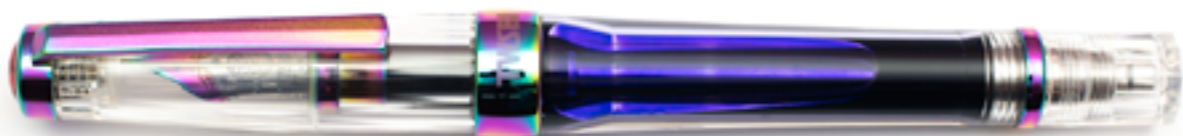


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Twsbi Vac700R Iris & Diamine Imperial Purple

Pen: TWSBI Vac700R Iris

Whilst the Eco and Diamond 580 lines are both piston fillers, this demonstrator uses a vacuum-based filling system. Its body is longer and, in places, thicker than its



cousins', and while the section is clear, it feels rubberised and provides a more secure grip than both the Eco and those 580s that do not have an aluminium section.

The Iris is a limited edition with a rainbow effect on its metal parts. This effect is not a result of a painting process; it is created using heat. As such, it should be resistant to any sort of chipping or wearing off. Apart from scratches—and scratching this pen visibly doesn't seem easy—the Iris's appearance looks to be durable and resistant to wear and tear.

To fill the Vac700R, one unscrews the back and pulls out the mechanism. Once submerged, moving the plunger down fills the pen. For longer writing sessions, it's suggested to unscrew the back, therefore automatically moving the piston back a couple of millimetres so it doesn't impede the flow of the ink. Earlier models (Vac700 without the R) required writers to manually pull the plunger back. With the R, they only need to unscrew the mechanism.

Even with the plunger down, my Iris—equipped with an M-nib—writes wet and juicy. Par for the course for TWSBI, I have

not run into any hard-starting or skipping issues. If anything, the writing experience might be a little too wet for my tastes.

For this special edition, supply is quite limited. I managed to find a model right after

my vendor restocked; they've since run out of stock again. If one finds an opportunity to purchase the Vac700R in retail (as opposed to resellers), the price fluctuates somewhere around the € 100.- mark. Slightly more affordable than the Diamond 580 S&RG II, the Iris is arguably more of an eye-catcher. Rose gold adornments have been popular for a while, but the rainbow (or iris) trend has only just begun.



Ink: Diamine Imperial Blue

With a heavy lean into violet, Imperial Blue is far from Diamine's most standard blue ink. Excluding special editions as well as shimmering and sheening inks, and drawing an arbitrary line between blue, turquoise, teal and mint, Diamine has about twenty shades of blue available, some of which can be hard to distinguish from each other even for a trained eye. Imperial Blue is certainly the exception, even managing to set itself apart from its sibling, Imperial Purple.

Like all standard Diamine inks—excluding Shimmertastic inks and some sheening or store-exclusive inks—Imperial Blue retails for € 4.50 for 30 millilitres (€ 0.15/ml) and € 9.- for 80 millilitres (€ 0.14/ml).



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