

Slowest, Shortest, Strongest, Longest: Becoming a Guinness World Record Champion

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Two attendants from a mental hospital strapped Mario Manzini into a Humane Restraint straight jacket. They tied his feet together with rope. Manzini dangled upside-down 50 feet in the air.

Eight and one-half seconds later, having dislocated both his right and left shoulders in order to bring his right sleeve over his head, Manzini was free of the jacket.

On August 17, 1979, professional escape artist Mario Manzini broke the Guinness World Record for Fastest Straight Jacket Escape, a record that remains unbroken 29 years later.

Manzini, who lives in Columbia, says his attempt was initiated by Guinness World Records. David Bohme, president of Sterling Publishers, called Manzini and asked him to make a record attempt. Guinness flew Manzini to Burbank, California, and made all the arrangements for his attempt.

For many of the 65,000 annual potential record breakers who apply to Guinness, the process isn't so speedy or problem-free.

Thumbelina, a dwarf miniature horse only 17.5 inches tall, is clearly the World's Smallest Horse. Though Thumbelina, born in 2001, is so small that she prefers the farm's doghouse over the stables, Guinness stalled Thumbelina's application until 2006.

"[Guinness] had to wait till she was like five, even though she stopped growing at, like, two," said Michael Goessling, Thumbelina's handler and manager at Goose Creek Farms in St. Louis.

When a response to Thumbelina's application finally came, it was in the form of an examination.

"When they came to St. Louis to do the photo shoot," Goessling said, "[Thumbelina's size was] confirmed with photos with her next to yardsticks."

Along with physical proof, Guinness "asked for some bits of information confirmed by [Thumbelina's] veterinarian," said Goessling.

The photos, combined with the veterinarian's affidavit, eventually earned Thumbelina the title of World's Smallest Horse – a title she obtained after years of unnecessary waiting.

In order to avoid snags that may cost years in the application process, many hopeful record breakers dish out the big bucks. Using the Fast Track and Fast Review services offered by Guinness, for a fee of roughly \$467 each, provides record breakers with Guinness Adjudicators and Records Managers for their events. Adjudicators and Managers can speed up claims, which otherwise might sit in the Guinness mailbox for months.

Steve Pona of St. Louis, one of the managers of the World's Longest Baseball Game, chose to hire an Adjudicator. He recalls guidelines placed on the game that lasted 32 hours, 29 minutes and 25 seconds.

"We were limited to 40 players," Pona said.

The group was also prohibited from using the term "Guinness" when raising money for the game – they were allowed to refer to it only as a "World Record" attempt.

Pona says Guinness was skeptical that the St. Louis group was dedicated to breaking a record until they sprang for an Adjudicator to oversee the event. Pona made sure to pamper the Guinness representative, who could immediately christen the event as a Guinness World Record upon its successful completion.

Still, Pona doesn't blame Guinness for treating his team "not personally".

"Can you imagine that kinda volume in your inbox?" Pona said of the thousands of record requests Guinness receives. "We weren't offended [by the treatment]."

Other aspiring record breakers, however, were not as lucky as Pona's group. Many attempts are disqualified on technicalities, much to the chagrin of those involved. The University of Missouri-Columbia's attempt at breaking the Guinness Book World Record for Longest Blood Drive saved 9,741 lives, but broke no records because it spanned two days, not one.

In hopes of avoiding complications associated with breaking a Guinness World Record Gamer's Edition record, and in order to bypass parts of the tedious application process, some gamers rely on websites to send videos of their virtual achievements to Guinness.

"We watched a King of Kong documentary during [sophomore and junior] MAP testing," Chris Jeffrey, Hickman alum '08, said.

The film inspired Jeffrey to tape himself beating the running shooter game Super Contra. He sent his tape to twingalaxies.com, a website that mediates between the Guinness Gamers Edition and potential record breaking gamers.

"I've basically got [Super Contra] memorized," Jeffrey said. "I probably beat it at least once a month."

Jeffrey's determination explains his record game completion time of 21 minutes, 19 seconds, which beat the previous Super Contra record of 24 minutes. Since the tape was sent to Twin Galaxies, Jeffrey has completed the game in 18 minutes, 29 seconds. He continues to strive to beat Super Contra in less than 15 minutes.

Bob Munden, the World's Fastest Quick Draw, shares Jeffrey's drive. Born in Kansas City, Munden is 66 years old and has been shooting guns for 55 years. The determination he feels to shoot a show perfectly makes it "almost impossible to keep up with yourself."

"A lot of times I've won a tournament, even though I won, I wasn't shooting well," Munden said. "I can't even make myself happy sometimes."

Munden, frustrated with his imperfection, constantly strives to improve. Still, he warns that the Guinness Book is not to be taken too seriously. A spelling bee where people never miss a word is "nothing short of incredible" he argues, but the legitimate, truly amazing record oftentimes is overshadowed by silly records, like those of people who "put themselves in a barrel over the Niagara Falls."

"I sure as heck wouldn't compare [a truly amazing feat] with somebody eating fifty hot dogs," Munden said.

The determination to attain faster speeds in quick-draw, Munden maintains, is more important than being listed in the Guinness Book. Being the best in his field is worth the effort he puts into it, recognition from Guinness or no recognition.

"Who took second in the Super Bowl last year?" Munden said. "We don't remember because it doesn't matter."

What does matter is being the best of the best, Munden says. Mario Manzini agrees with Munden, saying that the satisfaction is worth the sacrifice.

"As far as escapes go, I know nobody can touch me." Manzini said. "To me it's, like, an honor just to have the title."

Manzini says that his title as World's Fastest Straight Jacket Escape Artist legitimizes him to the general public and makes his shows more popular.

"I use that in my title." Manzini says. "It's like a boxer game. More people go to see the heavyweight champion than some guy they've never heard of."