

Records (male narrator)

By Craig Duncan

Paul Hunn of north London holds the world record for the loudest burp: he can burp at a volume of over 118 decibels. John Evans of Sheffield can balance 62 books on his head. And Peter Dowedswell of Northampton can eat an entire three course meal consisting of soup, sausages, beans, mashed potatoes and prunes in only 45 seconds.

When the world-famous Guinness Book of Records was first published in 1955, its intended purpose was to solve arguments about sporting statistics. Sports still figure highly in the modern version of the book, but each year more and more surreal achievements edge their way in. The farthest distance a strand of spaghetti can be fired out of a man's nose? 19 centimetres. The largest number of venomous cobras kissed consecutively by one man? 11.

We are all familiar with inspiring stories about a young athlete who discovers a sport that he or she loves, trains hard, and rises through the ranks of professional competition to become a world-class sports star. Anything can trigger off an interest. British Olympic cyclist Jason Queally had never even considered competing professionally until a leisurely afternoon's cycling with his girlfriend's brother-in-law changed his mind. Five years and a lot of training later, he won gold and silver medals at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Are the holders of the more bizarre records motivated in the same way? Most record-holders seem to think so. Ken Blackburn, who holds the world record for keeping a paper aeroplane in the air, describes his early interest in the field:

"I have always liked airplanes. At about 10 years old I discovered some paper airplane books with good flying planes. I began trying to design my own paper airplanes based on the aerodynamic principles in books about real airplanes. At 15 my parents bought me a Guinness book. The time aloft record was 15.0 seconds. My planes were close, so I had a goal."

As a college student Ken finally achieved his goal, recognition as the world's most successful paper plane-maker. Since then he has broken his own world record several times. Gordon Cates, whose record-breaking achievement is having kissed the heads of 11 deadly cobras in a row, is a professional snake-handler whose ability to read snakes' body language gave him the courage to attempt this dangerous feat. Kevin Cole, the world's most talented man in the field of firing spaghetti out of his own nose, started with an interest in firing noodles out of his nose for fun, and slowly worked his way up to full-sized spaghetti!

Some might argue that a lot of these records are pointless. But is there really any difference between being the most successful athlete and being the most successful paper plane-builder? Some records, especially sporting records, are widely viewed as being of great importance, even though they don't necessarily add anything to humanity's lot other than providing us with entertainment. More people are interested in, say, athletics than in cobra-kissing, but does that make an athletic record-breaker more important?

Everyone likes to have their achievements recognised, and there is no greater recognition than being named as the best in the world in your chosen field. Perhaps you're reading this and thinking about a special talent of your own that you'd like to be well-known for. Or perhaps you're thinking that you could fire a strand of spaghetti out of your nose for a much longer distance than 19 centimetres! Whatever your talent, there's a high chance that someone holds the world record for it. With the right amounts of skill and practice, perhaps the next world record-holder could be you? Personally, I hope to beat the record currently held by
– at 114 years old, she's the oldest person alive!