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## Book Review “Slide Rules - A.W. Faber & A.W. Faber-Castell”

Otto van Poelje

This neat little book is presented to the public by its author, Peter Holland, at the Greifswald IM2009 meeting, September 4 & 5, 2009.

The first impression is a compact little book, 15 by 21 cm, containing 128 pages richly filled with tables. The cover clearly indicates -by title and picture- the subject: Models, Types and Scales of Slide Rules by Faber-Castell and its predecessor firm A.W. Faber, see figure 1. Also a clear signal is already given of the bilingual approach, in German and English.



figure 1

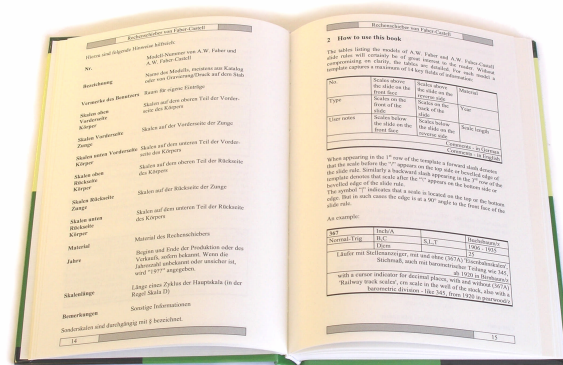


figure 2

In the introduction, the author states his aim as an “*overview of all slide rules by Faber and Faber-Castell*”. It could also be called a catalogue, and the structure is indeed organized as a tabular list of all F-C slide rule types. Opening the book at an arbitrary page in the middle, the reader will lapse into confusion unless he has begun properly by reading the table’s interpretation in the “*how to use*” section, see figure 2. This figure also shows the bilingual approach: here separate section versions are given in the German and in the English language. In the tables however the language differences are indicated only per matrix element where needed. One needs to get used to this approach, but this does not take long; the advantages in space efficiency are evident.

The whole design is aimed at showing the main aspects of a large number (almost 500) of F-C slide rule types to a wide public in a booklet of minimal dimensions and low cost. That also explains the choice to omit a multitude of colorful pictures that might have been inserted by a less focussed author. The number of aspects per slide rule type and their appearance in the table has been chosen by the author out of an almost infinite number of possibilities: it is a balance between level of detail, readability and size/cost of the book. Leaving out all possible variations of a type clearly has been a considered choice in this balance.

Not only the slide rule tables are important to collectors. The book also incorporates very helpful tables on the structure of the seemingly haphazard F-C type numbering scheme, the German registration marks and patents by F-C, and dating methods by construction details, materials used, inscriptions, logos etc. Of real practical use for the collector are the equivalence tables of slide rules having the same fit of cursor or the same type of case.

This book begs to be compared with other catalogues, like those by Herman van Herwijnen, Peter Hopp, or the tables in Dieter von Jezierski's book. In all comparisons the superior completeness of this book (although the author still warns for possible gaps!) is owing to the large progress collectors have made over the last years in their new acquisitions and deeper research. The more than 100 listed references give an impression of the wide range of sources used to compile this newest catalogue.

But Dieter's book gives a flowing account of the F-C history that reads like a novel, so we still need that. Also Herman's Blue Book (now Herman's Archive) and Peter Hopp's book may be less complete, but they give many other information aspects, for example the many variations of F-C slide rules in full detail, or the wider context of slide rules and their makers. However the most interesting comparison to make, is with one's own collection. Then we see how our individual Faber-Castell slide rules fit in their respective type schemes, and which of our spare slide rules can supply a missing cursor. And we can reflect on how many Fabers are still waiting out there, to be acquired by us!

My conclusion is that this booklet is a must-have for the serious collector of Faber-Castell slide rules who already has knowledge of slide rules, scales and the Faber Castell brand.

## **Book Details**

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