

The Inka Pen kicks off the first entry in our “gear” reviews section. Now, I’m not a pen specialist, but I genuinely appreciate practical gear that makes my life easier. I’m looking for solutions to problems, and the pen fills its niche very well.

Just last week I was caught short at a tradeshow when asked to fill out some form and questionnaire, but fortunately I had a stopgap solution to the pen problem by clipping cheap disposable pens to each and every bag of mine, so it didn’t work out too badly.

Those of you who have heard me talk about the concept of Every Day Carry (EDC) will already know that the logical solution to this is to carry a pen on you 100% of the time, just like lights, multitools, and everything else carried on my keyring. The thing is, you can never predict accurately when you will need this kind of gear, so EDC works for taking care of unexpected moments. You can never anticipate when you’ll need a screwdriver, a light, or a pen. If you CAN predict with failsafe accuracy, get in touch with me.. I think I need a few lottery numbers predicted.

So why not EDC a pen? Here’s why not - take for example a traditional pen. It’s a fairly long instrument, sharp at one end, tends to poke you, and it’s basically too big with all the junk I carry in my pockets. My usual working dress is NOT in a shirt and tie, so I have no convenient shirt pocket for the pens. And, since I am one of those who have TRULY succeeded in transitioning to an all-digital workflow, I only need a pen during moments when others ask me to fill forms or write stuff on paper. That having been said I’m not denying that they still remain useful in today’s digital world.

The Inka solves this problem by creating a tiny little pen that can hang on your keyring, and at the same time, with a little bit of adjustment, can convert to a full size pen that is comfortable in the hand for extended writing. They come in a choice of two materials, 304 stainless steel or titanium. I received evaluation units of both. The titanium pen feels substantially lighter, even without requiring a weighing scale to tell me that. If you want something that’s almost weightless, go for the titanium.

At the same time, when configured as a full size pen, the titanium one still feels quite substantial in the hand. A writing instrument needs a little bit of weight to ‘feel’ right, and surprisingly, the titanium does not feel too light, at least for me. YMMV, but it’s not as big an issue as it otherwise might have seemed.

The stainless steel version feels comfortable too, just a tiny bit more ‘heft’. Stainless steel is an excellent material as well, and holds up well to being damaged by keys on the keyring. For some reason, keys are THE single most

destructive item on the keyring. They destroy everything else, while miraculously remaining undamaged themselves. Some day I will find the secret to the hardness behind the Unobtainium they make keys out of.

Both pens have barrels made out of carbon fiber for strength. Neat pen.. neat engineering. It's not your traditional plastic pen, and it feels great in the hand. The barrel is the part where you grip, so it has to be comfortable, and it does well in this respect.

[To use the pen, just] pull it out to expose what they call the "Quick Use" pen. This is great if you need to quickly sign something or write your address and is useable immediately. It feels similar to using a short pencil, although of course, being a pen, it writes in permanent ink.

If you have additional time or expect to be writing a lot, the body can be reconfigured to become a full size pen.

The best part is that the split ring does not need to leave your keyring at all. Initially, I expected to be ordering yet another quick release clip for the pens, but they are so well made that they have no need for them. Those of you familiar with the Arc AAA light, which is just a little bit bigger than the AAA cell it uses, may find the pen a perfect complement to it.

And as anybody else who has lived for so long with the cheap disposable pens will realize, they don't write at an angle for long. They don't write upside down for long. The Inka pen cartridges are all pressurized. While not a new concept (some other pens already do this), it is nevertheless a GREAT feature to have.

For all its high-tech engineering, the pens work like traditional ballpoints. Very stylish ballpoints though. [I did] a sample of their writing compared to one of the other gel-based disposable pens (non-pressurized) I've come to like. This other gel based pen (which will remain anonymous) came to my attention because of its extremely smooth 'feel'. But even though the Inka doesn't use gel, it feels very smooth too. Begone, days of scratchy disposable ballpoints!!

And I just HAD to test the part about writing underwater. Long and short of it, it works. The harder part is finding paper that won't give way underwater, which I had to do for this test. I eventually resorted to using thicker cardboard. While 'underwater writing' seems farfetched and most of us don't anticipate needing a pen while swimming, do pause for a moment and recall that some day you may be caught in the rain and have to write something. That is a far more likely scenario and the Inka pen is more than capable of dealing with it. My favorite gel based pens may not be up to the job as the ink tends to run when it gets wet. Obviously, the Inka pen's ink doesn't run in the water.

Remember me talking about digital earlier? The Inka may be another pen in a LONG history of writing instruments but it does acknowledge its existence in a digital world by incorporating a PDA stylus made of Delrin! This material is preferred because it does not scratch or damage PDA screens.

That makes the Inka pen even more useful, in case you accidentally lose your PDA stylus - well, face it, it can happen. I've only ever lost one in all my years of carrying a PDA (since the days of ye olde Palm IIIxe - what a GREAT PDA), but I know some folks who go through tons of them, they're the reasons why stylies are sold in 3-packs This sure beats all the times where I have used a normal pen (with tip retracted, I like the clickie pens) as a makeshift PDA stylus. Of course, the latter approach is NOT designed specifically for a PDA and I ran the risk of marking my screen by accident. The Inka stylus is specially designed for PDAs, so you needn't worry about it scratching.

The Inka's stylus of course, is a little bit harder to lose being on your keyring all the time. However, avoid losing the entire pen assembly, because while the refills are just \$4 each, I DON'T think you can buy the carbon-fiber barrel of the pen itself separately. (Update: I've since been informed that you may be able to buy the carbon fiber assembly if you lose one, as a replacement part. But try not to lose it anyway.)

So what do I feel about the pens? When I was first told about them, I immediately knew I wanted one on my keychain and I am buying one of these, so I am reviewing my own personal pen that will sit on my keyring. Most places have some kind of award for their best products, you could call mine the "I'll take it, payment sent" award, when I myself start putting down hard earned money to buy the product for my own use.

Special thanks to Lighthouse.com for supplying both the pens. If you want *THE* ultimate EDC pen, go for the titanium version, it's awesome. If you're on a budget, or presenting the pen to someone as a gift, the stainless steel version represents excellent value for money.