



### Floaty Facts

- In 1997, the Idaho Center for the Book at Boise State University created an exhibition entitled “Fabulous Floaty Pens.” It was the first academic exploration of floaty pens as artistic and cultural objects.
- What floats? The most commonly seen “floaters” are vehicles such as trains, boats and cars. The floaty pen from Norway’s Stalheim Hotel features a floating bus on the unforgettably winding drive to the hotel’s mountaintop site.
- What else floats? Floaters have depicted everything from Coke bottles to pilgrims from *The Canterbury Tales*. Collectors covet the group of promotional floaty pens made for bovine artificial insemination companies, such as Hawkeye Breeders, which feature cartoons of floating bull sperm.
- Among the U.S. presidents who have been depicted on floaty pens are Richard M. Nixon (meeting Elvis Presley in the Oval Office), Dwight D. Eisenhower (driving golf balls) and Franklin D. Roosevelt (in an open car with his dog Fala chasing behind him).
- The latest celebrity to be immortalized on a floaty pen is Australian singer Kylie Minogue.



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custom-made for Eskesen’s purposes. About 130 people are employed at the Eskesen factory in Store Merløse, 60 miles from Copenhagen.

The pens—some 14 million per year—are assembled by scores of homeworkers in the Store Merløse community who visit the factory daily to pick up new components. Eskesen is the biggest employer in town.

For floaty pen collectors, Store is a kind of Mecca. More than 200 floaty fans, from as far away as Japan, turned out for Eskesen’s last factory “open day” in 2000. Others, who call ahead to make arrangements (myself included), have been treated to personal factory tours. And for those who have yet to make the pilgrimage to Denmark, Eskesen keeps a Christmas list of its most loyal fans.

The sleepy village of Store Merløse—population 1,200—is friendly if nondescript. You’d hardly notice it, situated in the flat countryside of north-central Sjælland (Sealand). While it might be a stop on some travelers’ itineraries, one probably can’t consider Store Merløse a full-fledged tourist destination yet. That status will come only after it has been immortalized on a floaty pen.

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Freelance journalist **Leslie Gilbert Elman** has written about Roskilde Cathedral, Arne Jacobsen, Finnish saunas and Keiko the orca for *Scandinavian Review*.

**There are also** floaty key chains, cigarette lighters, letter openers and pocket-sized screw drivers.