



# The Kingfisher Book of How Things Work | The Big Book of How Things Work

Books Reviewed:

[The Kingfisher Book of How Things Work](#) [1]

Books Reviewed:

[The Big Book of How Things Work](#) [2]

Issue:

[66](#) [3]

Reviewer:

[Geoff Brown](#) [4]

Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

0

Books which explain how things work are always useful, and the appearance of two new titles on the subject is good news. It also provides opportunities to compare their relative strengths and weaknesses and to see how they measure up to Neil Ardley and David Macaulay's **The Way Things Work**, published by Dorling Kindersley in 1988 and arguably the market leader.

Neither of the new titles is designed to be read from cover to cover - they are books for looking things up in or dipping into. They differ widely in scope and coverage. The 'Big Book' examines less than forty subjects making no mention of fax machines, toasters, ballpoint pens, central-heating systems, microwave ovens, or scales - all of which feature amongst the 200+ subjects covered by the Kingfisher book.

The text of the Kingfisher title is generally good with simple, well-explained, jargon-free paragraphs. Illustrations are colourful but not always clear; perspective can be an occasional problem, as when a light meter appears to go through someone's hand and a toaster switch appears to pass through the casing of the machine itself!

Accurate, clearer drawings with good use of cutaways are to be found in the 'Big Book'. The greater space allowed to develop the text in this volume leads to more satisfactory consideration of complicated subjects such as the nuclear power station or the petrol engine. (This particularly effective section in the 'Big Book' contrasts with a confusing one in the Kingfisher volume which portrays the two-stroke engine in four stages!)

Both books have notable strengths and weaknesses. The Kingfisher title looks modern and attractive, it is clear, interesting and comprehensive, and will no doubt prompt dipping. The 'Big Book' is less immediately attractive but it does have excellent illustrations and it is much better at explaining complexities.

It would not be fair, though, to finish without a reminder of Ardley and Macaulay's book mentioned in the first

paragraph. It is more comprehensive than either of the 'How it works' books in its subject coverage and has a great deal of humour and wit. Most importantly it explains how things work in a scientific/technological context. Thus, machines hugely different in scale or use are grouped together by the same mechanical principles which determine their design (car brakes and oil rigs, for example, appear together under 'friction'). Despite occasional flaws it is an exceptional book of high quality. The new titles don't match it but they do complement - buy all three if you can!

Running Order:

13

---

**Source URL (retrieved on Aug '20):** <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/66/childrens-books/reviews/the-kingfisher-book-of-how-things-work-%C2%A6-the-big-book-of-how-things>

**Links:**

[1] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-kingfisher-book-of-how-things-work>

[2] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/childrens-books/the-big-book-of-how-things-work>

[3] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/66>

[4] <http://w.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/geoff-brown>