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The Birkin Bag

Read the text below, choose the correct answers (A, B, C, D) .

The Birkin bag is more than just a handbag—it's a legend, a dream, and a phenomenon that has captured the imagination of the world. Its journey began in 1984 on a seemingly ordinary flight. Jane Birkin, the British actress and singer, was seated next to Jean-Louis Dumas, the head of Hermès. As the story goes, Jane's straw bag spilled open mid-flight, scattering her belongings everywhere. Frustrated, she told Dumas how impossible it was to find a stylish yet practical bag for everyday life. Inspired by her complaint, Dumas grabbed an airplane sick bag and sketched out what would become the world's most famous handbag.

What began as a functional solution quickly turned into an icon of luxury. The Birkin wasn't initially designed to be the phenomenon it is today, but as time passed, it became a status symbol, adored by celebrities and collectors alike. Even though Jane Birkin herself famously said, "Why would I want more than one?" when asked about owning one more bag that bore her name, her sentiment feels almost unbelievable today. Collectors now hoard dozens of Birkins as though they were priceless treasures. Victoria Beckham reportedly owns over 100, while Kylie Jenner once shared a photo of her closet with a rainbow of Birkins, including one her daughter, Stormi, carries as a toy.

Part of what makes the Birkin so irresistible is the mystery surrounding it. Hermès has mastered the art of exclusivity by keeping its production numbers secret, ensuring no one really knows just how many Birkins exist. This deliberate opacity fuels the desire to own one—after all, the less attainable something feels, the more valuable it becomes. But the exclusivity doesn't stop there. You can't simply walk into an Hermès boutique and buy a Birkin, no matter how much money you're willing to spend. In most cases, customers need to build a relationship with a sales associate, often by purchasing other Hermès items over time. This unspoken "vetting" process turns the acquisition of a Birkin into a personal journey. The bag isn't just sold; it's earned. This practice has added to the bag's legendary status. Shoppers often buy scarves, jewelry, or even furniture from Hermès just to improve their chances of getting on the waiting list. The idea that owning a Birkin requires more than money makes it feel like a prize reserved for the truly dedicated, a treasure that few are privileged to hold. It's not just about the bag; it's about the story of how it was acquired. Adding to the exclusivity is the fact that customers can't choose the specific color, leather, or design they want. Instead, Hermès decides which bags to offer to which clients. A customer might dream of a soft pink Birkin or a classic black one, but they must accept whatever the boutique offers them, or risk waiting indefinitely. This element of surprise, combined with the rarity of certain designs, has elevated the bag's allure even further.

One of the rarest and most coveted Birkins is the Himalayan Birkin, named for its unique color gradient that mimics the snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas. Made from matte crocodile leather and often adorned with white gold or diamond hardware, this bag is considered the pinnacle of luxury. With prices starting in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, the Himalayan Birkin is seen as the ultimate status symbol. The most expensive one ever sold fetched over $500,000 at auction, solidifying its place as not just a bag, but a piece of art and a financial asset.

The craftsmanship of the Birkin only adds to its allure. Each bag is handmade by Hermès artisans in France, a process that can take up to 18 hours. From the carefully selected leathers to the impeccable stitching, every Birkin is a masterpiece of precision and artistry. Hermès doesn't mass-produce these bags, ensuring that each one feels unique and personal.

Despite its high price and exclusivity, the Birkin remains surprisingly relevant. Social media has only added to its appeal, with influencers showcasing their collections or even renting Birkins for photo shoots. For many,

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owning a Birkin represents a milestone—a dream achieved, a story worth sharing. Even Jane Birkin herself seemed puzzled by the bag's meteoric rise. Known for her laid-back attitude, she admitted to using her Birkin as a diaper bag and letting her dog chew on it. Her casual treatment of the bag feels almost ironic today, considering the reverence it commands.

The Birkin's value doesn't stop at Hermès stores—it continues to grow in the resale market, where the demand is even higher. In this market, a Birkin can sell for double or even triple its original price, especially if it's rare or in excellent condition. Collectors often look for these bags at auctions or luxury resale websites, hoping to find their dream piece. What makes the resale market even more exciting is the element of discovery—buyers often come across unique colors or discontinued designs that can't be found in Hermès boutiques anymore. Resale experts have even created guides to help shoppers spot authentic Birkins, as counterfeits are common in this lucrative market. Owning a pre-loved Birkin comes with its own sense of history, as many buyers feel they're not just purchasing a bag, but becoming part of its journey.

The Birkin bag's story is one of artistry, exclusivity, and cultural fascination. From a sketch on a sick bag to the pinnacle of luxury, it has become more than just a handbag—it's a symbol of dreams, status, and the extraordinary power of storytelling. Owning one may be out of reach for most, but its magic continues to captivate, reminding us that sometimes, even the simplest moments can inspire legends.

1. What inspired the creation of the Birkin bag?

A) Jane Birkin's desire for a larger bag.

B) The immense popularity of straw bags in the 1980s.

C) Jane Birkin's difficulty finding a fashionable and functional bag.

D) Jean-Louis Dumas' ambition to create a luxury straw bag.

2. How did Hermès ensure the Birkin would become exclusive?

A) By making it only available to celebrities.

B) By keeping the number of bags undisclosed.

C) By advertising the bag in fashion magazines.

D) By limiting it to online purchases.

3. Which of the following strategies do customers use to improve their chances of acquiring a Birkin bag?

A) Buying other Hermès products.

B) Joining a waitlist for the bag.

C) Negotiating with sales associates.

D) *Purchasing the bags of other brands.*

4. What does the text suggest about Jane Birkin's attitude towards her iconic bag?

A) She carefully preserves it.

B) She takes great pride in it.

C) She uses it for practical purposes.

D) She keeps it on display.

5. Which statement about Hermès bags is NOT true?

A) It's not up to the buyer to choose the color of their Birkin bag.

B) Some Hermès bags may cost more than half a million dollars.

C) The secondary market provides unique Birkin bags that are officially out of production.

D) Kylie Jenner owns a rainbow-colored Birkin.

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