

Re: WHAT'S NEW Robert L. Park Friday, 15 Feb 08, Washington, DC

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On Feb 15, 5:56 pm, Sam Wormley <sworml...@xxxxxxxx> wrote:

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1. PERPETUUM MOBILE: THIS YEAR LIKE EVERY YEAR.

I probably missed a few, but I estimate that every year I see about five perpetual motion machine claims. You may recall Steorn, the Dublin company that assembled a jury of scientists to evaluate its 2006 claim of generating free energy from "rotating magnets"<http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN06/wn082506.html>. In 2007 the company went belly-up. The first one this year is the Perepiteia invented by Thane Heins of Almonte, Ontario, who fits the mold perfectly. The 46-year old Heins is not scientist; he dropped out of an electronics program, but earned a chef's diploma. The secret? "Rotating magnets." His wife took the children and left over his obsession with Perepiteia. "I have mild dyslexia and don't do well in math," Heins told the Toronto Star, "so I don't do well in school." But wait, two weeks ago an MIT Electrical Engineering Professor, Marcus Zahn agreed to view a demonstration. Heins held a permanent magnet a few centimeters from an induction motor – and it speeded up. Wow! The Toronto Star contacted Zahn, who said it surprised him. WN is trying to reach Zahn.

2. MISSILE DEFENSE: INVENTION OF THE HYDRAZINE BOMB.

First the public was assured that the danger from a school bus sized "spy satellite" expected to make an uncontrolled reentry is "very small." Now we learn the President has ordered the Navy to shoot it down with a missile interceptor because it's carrying a tank of dangerous hydrazine. How dangerous is hydrazine? "If you inhale a lot of it, it could in fact be deadly," an official said, which is true of most fuels. It's a standard low-power propellant used in spacecraft maneuvering thrusters. Perhaps the most serious consequence of shooting the satellite down is the space debris it would generate. When China used an interceptor to shoot down an obsolete weather satellite it littered low-Earth orbit with more than 100,000 fragments, and the Bush Administration expressed outrage. In any case, the probability of it hitting a populated area is slight, and speculation has focused on the "real" reasons for wanting to shoot it down.

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3. GUNS: YET ANOTHER UNIVERSITY SHOOTING RAMPAGE.

Before the Super-Tuesday primaries I got a dozen emails telling me "a vote for Huckabee is a vote for the Second Amendment." I don't care how much fun people get out of blowing away cottontail rabbits and mourning doves, this is the 21st Century and it's time to start controlling the availability of hand guns and assault weapons.

4. NCCAM: JOSEPHINE BRIGGS NAMED DIRECTOR.

The second Director of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, she replaces Stephen Straus who died last year <http://bobpark.physics.umd.edu/WN07/wn060707.html> and is expected to continue his policy of rigorous science. Asked by Science if anything that works had come out of CAM, she paused and replied that, "the tai chi for shingles was very nice."

THE UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND.

Opinions are the author's and not necessarily shared by the University of Maryland, but they should be.

Sam, I really don't know what you are concerned about most, either Robert Park (who most of us don't take very seriously) or Hydrazine, which does get a bit of attention. Since it has been used as a rocket fuel, and in doing so has, to the best of my knowledge, never presented any particular problem,

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydrazine/>

What will be interesting is to watch our ability to intercept the satellite and shoot it down, for obvious strategic interests. The implications of such an event directly impact the GPS constellation.

Harry C.