

For the record

There's a lot more to the LHC programme than just finding the Higgs boson; to me the Higgs boson is just a matter of unfinished business

Peter Higgs from *Edinburgh University* quoted on *BBC Radio 4's Today programme*

Higgs was speaking during a recent trip to CERN where researchers are hoping that the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) will pick up signatures of the particle he proposed over 40 years ago.

It would not surprise me if the experimenters don't find the Higgs particle – I don't trust the theory behind it

Nobel laureate **Martin Veltman** of the *University of Utrecht in the Netherlands* quoted in the *Daily Telegraph*

When asked what he expects to be found when the LHC is switched on, Veltman expressed doubt that the Higgs, supersymmetry or any experimental verification of string theory will emerge.

I certainly have known it. I think that makes me reasonably well educated

John Denham, the *UK government's secretary of state for innovation, universities and skills* quoted in *New Scientist*

Denham, who has a degree in chemistry, was asked if he knew the second law of thermodynamics, after using C P Snow's essay on the two cultures as a theme in a recent speech. In the essay, Snow famously complained that many apparently well-educated people do not know the second law.

Molecular biology has a much greater future ahead of it than the traditional sciences

Nobel laureate **Gerhard Ertl** of the *Fritz Haber Institute of the Max Planck Society in Berlin*, quoted in *Max Planck Research*

Ertl, who originally studied physics and received last year's Nobel Prize for Chemistry, says that he would choose to study biology if he were to start over again.

This looks distinctly flaky to me

Brian Josephson from the *University of Cambridge* quoted in *New Scientist*

Josephson was commenting on a recent paper on the arXiv preprint server that looked at the mechanism of poltergeist phenomena, which stated that young children can create disturbances a few metres away via changes in brain activity that occur during puberty (arXiv:0801.0382).

Seen and heard



Einstein gets in the zone

Can you find the zone in the fabric of space-time? In a promotional film starring US basketball superstar Kobe Bryant made by the marketing company Zambezi Ink, Bryant appears dressed up as Einstein while shooting hoops and wearing Nike's new "zoom Kobe III" shoes. With Bryant in the background performing slam dunks, a child in front holding the shoe proclaims that "it won't help you master quantum physics, but it will put you in the zone where time stops and everything seems effortless". Apparently, the zone is where genius lies and this shoe will help you get there. The Einstein clip is the third instalment of a five-part "genius" series that has already seen Bryant dressed as Leonardo da Vinci and as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Whether aspiring Einsteins will be wearing the zoom Kobe III shoes in their labs remains to be seen.

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Energy, mass and Mariah

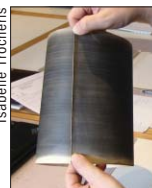
As if Kobe Bryant dressed up as Einstein weren't enough, now the singer Mariah Carey has launched a new album entitled $E=MC^2$. Could this be the start of a new trend for celebrities getting interested in physics? Sadly not. Carey's previous disc released in 2005 was entitled *The Emancipation of Mimi*, and the new album name does not reveal Carey's enthusiasm for mass-energy equivalence but rather her belief that it is better than her last recording and is therefore, as she puts it, *The Emancipation of Mimi* to the second power. Indeed, when asked by musical magazine *NME* what she thought about physics and Einstein's original equation, Carey replied "physics, me, hello! I even failed remedial math".

Courting controversy

Here we go again. After filing a lawsuit in 1999 to try and stop the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider (RHIC) at the Brookhaven National Laboratory from operating

because he feared it would produce strangelets and black holes that would gobble up the Earth, Walter Wagner, a trained nuclear physicist, has now set his sights on the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) at CERN. Wagner, who is based in Hawaii, and his colleague Luis Sancho have filed a federal lawsuit in the US District Court in Honolulu to prevent the LHC from starting up as expected this summer. So what is the culprit this time? Well, strangelets and black holes once again – even though RHIC came online in 2000 and our planet is still here (see "Fears over factoids" *Physics World* August 2007 pp16–17). In the new lawsuit, Wagner and Sancho claim that if the LHC is switched on, then the Earth will eventually fall into a growing micro black hole, thus converting our planet into a medium-sized black hole, around which the Moon, artificial satellites and the International Space Station would orbit. Thankfully, with plans for the International Linear Collider – the next big experiment in particle physics – still up in the air, this could be the last time Wagner tries to stop a major particle accelerator from beginning operations.

Isabelle Trocheris



Audio's holy grail

The oldest known recording of a human voice has recently been discovered by US historians. Until now it had always been thought that the earliest example was Thomas Edison's 1877 recording of himself reciting "Mary Had a Little Lamb", which was captured on a sheet of tinfoil. But now that has been eclipsed by a recording of an unknown woman singing a French folk song entitled "Au Clair de la Lune". Lasting 10 seconds, the recording dates from 1860 and was made using a "phonograph", which was invented by the Parisian printer Edouard-Léon Scott de Martinville. The device works by etching sound waves onto paper that is covered in soot. The recording was discovered in a Paris patent-office archive in early March by a group of US audio historians led by David Giovannoni. The recording was made playable by physicists Carl Haber and Earl Cornell at the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California, who made high-resolution digital scans of the paper and converted these into sound.

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