Unattended garage tinkerers can cause a brew-ha-ha

Dave Barry

IT'S time for "Guys in Science," the feature in which we report on the heroic efforts of guys, using scientific knowledge, to explore, and exceed, the limits of common sense.

We begin with this IMPORTANT SAFETY ADVISORY: The activities described here are very dangerous. These activities were engaged in by expert guys with specialized experience in such fields as physics and accordion repair. Do NOT attempt any of these activities unless you have a signed statement from a medical doctor certifying that, in his professional opinion, you are a moron who deserves to die. Do not even READ this column without safety goggles.

Our first guy is Simon Hansen of Auckland, New Zealand, where guys are called "blokes." According to Simon's Web site (www.ascimation.co nz/beer/), brought to my attention by many alert guy readers, Simon was in his garage when he realized that he had a very serious guy problem: His beer was warm.

Now many people, faced with this problem, would solve it via some low-tech, unscientific method such as putting the beer on ice or in a refrigerator. But Simon is not "many people." He decided to cool his beer by — I am not making this up — building a jet engine. He welded it together, largely from automobile parts, right there in his garage.

To understand how a jet engine could make beer cold, you need to know something about physics. Fortunately, I studied physics under the legendary Mr. Heideman at Pleasantville High School. Unfortunately, we frittered away our time studying such topics as the fulcrum and never got to the part about cooling beer with a jet engine.

But if I follow Simon's explanation, the whole purpose of his engine is to suck the fuel — liquid petroleum gas — very rapidly out of a fuel tank. For some reason, possibly involving molecules, this rapid sucking action — in addition to being a good name for a rock band — causes the fuel tank to get very cold. So when Simon wants to chill a can of beer, he simply puts it into a tub of water, puts the fuel tank into the tub, fires up his jet engine, and, voilà, he is deaf. That's because his engine has a noise level of 125 decibels. To give you an idea what that means: If you were exposed to that many decibels, at close range and without ear protection, you would be sitting in my son's car.

So, yes, it's noisy. But there's an old saying among scientific guys: "You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, ideally by dropping a cement truck on them from a crane." The bottom line is this: When Simon ran his jet engine, his beer-can temperature decreased from 11 degrees C to 2 degrees C in just five minutes. This is very impressive, and would be even more so if we knew what a "C" was.

The important thing is that this guy, using science, has found a new, innovative and — above all — loud way to cool beer. Perhaps this will inspire other guys to come up with an even MORE scientific method, such as shooting beer cans into outer space, or sending them backward in time to the Ice Age. That's how your major scientific discoveries are made, and that's why, in the interest of progress, it is so very important, when a guy is in his garage, never to interrupt him with petty requests that he mow the lawn, take out the garbage, go to his wedding, etc.

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For our other example of Guys in Science, we go to San Francisco, where a guy named Kimric Smythe — who makes his living in the field of accordion sales and repair — recently attached several ordinary household vacuum cleaners to a propane fuel line, then turned them on. As you have no doubt realized, he had a scientific reason for doing this: to see what happens.

It turns out that what happens is very bad for the vacuum cleaners. I have some photographs of the experiment sent to me by Kimric's proud father, Bill Smythe. Some of the vacuum cleaners briefly transform into rockets, but pretty soon, as Kimric informed me in a telephone interview, they tend to suffer a major appliance malfunction, sometimes involving shrapnel.

This is an important experiment, because it proves, scientifically, that it would be a big mistake, no matter how tempting it may be, for us to try to build rockets using vacuum cleaners powered by propane. Somebody should tell NASA immediately. Maybe you could do that, OK? I'm going to have a cold one.

Knight-Ridder Tribune

JUMBLE

Answer :

UNIQUE MARKUP DEPICT
PENMAN EMBARK EQUITY

What the climber experienced when he couldn't reach the summit —

A PEAK PEEK PIQUE

Puzzle on Page 3E.

The Joule-Thompson Effect.
Ahh, practical applications of this class....