

## Our Macho Mr. Sun: Making Solar Sexy by Aurelio O'Brien

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IN THE BLACKENED WAKE of the gulf oil spill and rig explosions, and the slow-cooking of our planet by greenhouse gasses, interest in what to do about our long-term energy needs has been renewed. We environmental do-gooders are all trying to do our bit to curb our carbon footprints, but when *Wired Magazine* points out that it takes as much fossil fuel to manufacture the battery for a Toyota Pious (pardon me) Prius as its driver would burn traveling 46,000 miles in a small non-hybrid, this means I'd only begin cutting my carbon footprint after I'd driven about 100,000 miles. So it seems that having everyone switch to a hybrid is not the best solution to our long-term energy and environmental problems.

But whatever solution we choose, it must be a macho one. Let's face it, we tree huggers have an image crisis when it comes to making our case for alternatives. Our pet solutions come off as those wimps in the back of comic books who get sand kicked in their faces when stacked up against their more macho competitors. The real tough guys simply want more drilling, come hell or high (and mucky) water. Drilling oil is manly, dig-in-the-dirt, smelly work, and it takes big burly men and machines to do it. Of course, we'll still eventually run out of the stuff, and the spills, explosions, and global warming must be ignored like a muscle guy's malodorous laundry pile on the closet floor. But Mr. Oil is our familiar BMOC, the guy that helped us win all the games in all the previous seasons. Okay, so he's gotten a little rough around the edges, has demanded a more lucrative contract, and has taken to wearing turbans more often than not; he's still our reliable hero.

Mr. Nuclear is the next best, big, truly macho energy guy. Real men love Mr. Nuclear. Yeah, sure, he's a little brainy, but he still demands more big, manly machines and he plays with deadly isotopes. Hey, risk of face-melting death and mass destruction is pure macho. Of course, it means ignoring the vast amounts of nuclear waste he produces. If you're macho though, you don't care about that. After all, it's like cleaning the damned garage: he'll get around to it... someday. Mr. Geothermal and Mr. Hydroelectric are real men too, to be sure, but they are like those poor saps who do a decent, steady job for years and years and are always overlooked for promotion. Not wimps, exactly, but they're not like the charm fellows. They're stodgy and set in their ways. Boring.

Then there's Mr. Ethanol, but he's kind of an also-ran, or perhaps the guy who made it in to the competition by bribing a judge or two? The farmers who work for him are legitimately macho, but Mr. Ethanol himself conjures images of Florence Henderson, corncoobs, and Fritos. He is only a simulacrum of Mr. Oil, more like the guy wearing fake chest hair and using Grecian Formula. And the more ethanol they add to gasoline the less efficient it has become. Decreased mileage means we have to use more gallons to go the same distance. I'm not clever enough to do an accurate calculation, but my gut tells me Mr. Ethanol is a fraud. And, well... do we really want to give up our Fritos in order for him to win?

So where do all the cleaner, more environmentally safe guys

I've been rooting for stand? According to *Scientific American*, Mr. Wind is remarkably efficient and clean, but let's face it, he lands close to the bottom of the macho scale. Yes, his props are big machines, but they bear an unfortunate resemblance to circus rides, pinwheels, eggbeaters, and beanie caps. I don't know, maybe if he got really, *really* big... or meaner looking? I like Mr. Wind a lot, but he's a dark horse.

Call me crazy, but I'm putting my money on Mr. Sun, even though he's been long considered lowest on the macho scale because of his unfortunate given name, Passive Solar. Did his parents really have to name him that? I mean, why not just tape a "kick me" sign on his back? The worse part about his name is that Mr. Sun has to be the most truly macho energy source of them all. He definitely warrants the more apt and studlier title, Macho Mr. Sun. Our ancestors worshiped Mr. Sun as a god, and with good reason: he already runs our climate, weather, and supports all life on Earth. According to Wikipedia he also dumps down approximately 3850 ZJ (zettajoules) of energy per year, free for the taking. To put this in perspective, worldwide energy consumption for the year 2005 was a mere 0.487 ZJ. In other words, our Macho Mr. Sun is one super-potent son-of-a-gun. But let's face facts, Mr. Sun desperately needs a major media makeover if he's going to win this competition. Macho Mr. Sun blasts us with more energy than we could ever possibly need without demanding anything in return; he's a nice guy, and we all know what that means. It means he needs our unrelenting support.

Any kid with a magnifying glass can attest to Macho Mr. Sun's awesome potential. As we create technologies that are more adept at capturing his unfathomable energy, won't that make all of us freer agents, give us the ability to go where we want to go whenever we want to, and not be limited, not be tied to Mr. Oil's or Mr. Nuclear's apron strings? Free, limitless, decentralized solar capabilities will mean more macho stuff, not less: more power tools, more recreational vehicles, more freedom, and more independence. He will allow us to be like farmers, prospectors, homesteaders, and explorers of the past, able to glean our own power ourselves. What's more manly than that? We won't need no stinkin' limits on our consumption once we've crowned Macho Mr. Sun.

C'mon, he deserves to win. He's the real, pure, unfiltered macho man. Booyah, Mr. Sun!



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