



When Flight 175 hit the corner of the South Tower most of the fuel exploded in the air (top inset). The fireball only lasted 10 seconds. Large flames were visible immediately after the strike (main photo) but they gradually diminished. 56 minutes after the crash, the South Tower exploded outward into shards of steel and pulverized concrete dust (right inset). This could not have been caused by the so-called pancake effect.

Popular Mechanics' Assault on

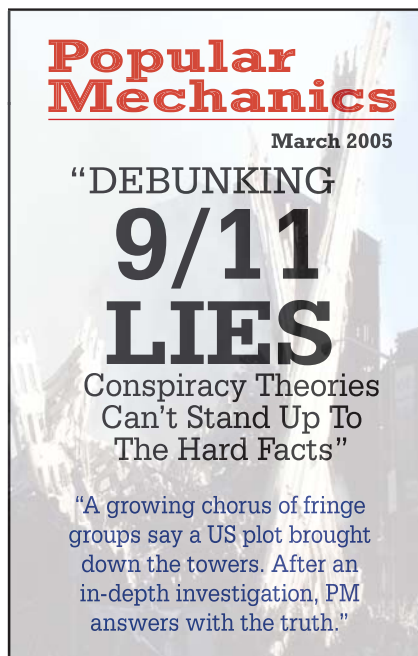
9/11 | Truth |

THE HEARST-OWNED *Popular Mechanics* (*PM*) targeted the 9/11 Truth movement (without ever acknowledging it by that name) with a cover story in its March 2005 edition.¹ Sandwiched between ads and features for monster trucks, NASCAR paraphernalia, and off-road racing are twelve dense and brilliantly designed pages purporting to debunk the myths of 9/11, which it proclaims *can't stand up to the hard facts*.

The article's approach is to identify and attack a series of claims which it asserts represent the whole of 9/11 skepticism. In each case *PM* describes a *conspiracy theorist* claim in a paragraph labeled **CLAIM** and follows it with several paragraphs of debunking labeled **FACT**. In this critique we examine each of *PM*'s claims in three parts: **PM's PURPORTED CLAIM**; which excerpts the key elements of *PM*'s **CLAIM** paragraph; **PM's COUNTER CLAIM**, which summarizes *PM*'s debunking of that claim; and **OUR REBUTTAL**, which provides our analysis of *PM*'s argument.

PM gives the false impression that these claims, several of which are clearly absurd, represent the breadth of challenges to the official account of the flights, the World Trade Center attack, and the Pentagon attack. Thus it purports to debunk *conspiracy theorists'* physical-evidence based claims, without even acknowledging that there are other grounds on which to question the official story. Indeed many 9/11 researchers don't even address the physical evidence, preferring instead to focus on who had the means, motive, and opportunity to carry out the attack.

We debunk *PM*'s front cover article which read:



Simulated (not actual) cover

Some of this evidence is summarized at the end of this critique. While ignoring these and many other facts belying the official story, *PM* attacks a mere 16 claims of its choosing, which it asserts are the *most persistent conspiracy theories of September 11*.

PM groups these claims into four topics, each of which is given a richly illustrated two or four-page spread. Since nearly all the physical-evidence-based challenges to the official story fall within one or another of these topics, the article gives the impression that it addresses the breadth of these challenges. However, for each topic, the article presents specious claims to divert the reader from understanding the issue. For example, the topic devoted to attacking the Twin Towers' demolition presents three red herring claims and carefully avoids the most compelling arguments that we (so-called conspiracy theorists) advance to prove that the towers collapsed due to controlled demolitions.²

The article brackets its distortion of the issues highlighted by 9/11 skeptics with smears against the skeptics themselves, whom it dehumanizes and accuses of *disgracing the memories* of the victims, and repeatedly accuses of harassing individuals who responded to the attack. More importantly, it misrepresents skeptics' views by implying that the skeptics' community is an undifferentiated *army* that wholly embraces the article's sixteen *poisonous claims*, which it asserts are *at the root of virtually every 9/11 alternative scenario*. In fact, much of the 9/11 Truth community has been working to expose many of these claims as disinformation (or straw men).

JIM HOFFMAN

The Lies Are Out There ... [They sure are. – Ed.]

THE MARCH ISSUE of *Popular Mechanics* has a one-page editorial, *The Lies Are Out There*, by James Meigs who was appointed editor of *Popular Mechanics* in May 2004. Meigs, whose previous columns have praised military technology (such as the UAVs used in Fallujah), places outside of society anyone who questions the official version of events of 9/11/01:

We as a society accept the basic premise that a group of Islamist terrorists hijacked four airplanes and turned them into weapons against us.... Sadly, the noble search for truth is now being hijacked by a growing army of conspiracy theorists.

Meigs throws a series of insults at all 9/11 *conspiracy theorists*, saying they ignore the facts and engage in *elaborate, shadowy theorizing*, and concludes his diatribe by saying:

[T]hose who peddle fantasies that this country encouraged, permitted or actually carried out the attacks are libeling the truth – and disgracing the memories of the thousands who died that day.

Besides trashing the skeptics, and conflating this country with its corrupt leaders, Meig's attempts to legitimize *PM's investigation*, saying:

We assembled a team of reporters and researchers, including professional fact checkers and the editors of PM, and methodically analyzed all 16 conspiracy claims. We interviewed scores of engineers, aviation experts, military officials, eyewitnesses and members of the investigative teams who have held the wreckage of the attacks in their own hands. We pored over photography,

maps, blueprints, aviation logs and transcripts. In every single instance, we found that the facts used by the conspiracy theorists to support their fantasies were mistaken, misunderstood, or deliberately falsified.

This sounds impressive, but the article provides no evidence to back up these claims. It provides no footnotes to source its many assertions, and despite the scores of *experts* listed in its final section the article cites only a handful of them, and mostly to refute its 'straw man' claims. Moreover, bold unsubstantiated claims in the article – such as *PM's* assertion that there was only a single interception of an off-course plane in the decade before 9/11/01 – don't inspire confidence in *PM's professional fact checkers*. It echoes the discredited assertions of official reports such as the *World Trade Center Building Performance Study* by the US government's own Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the *9/11 Commission Report*. It provides no evidence that *PM* investigated the attack – only evidence that it investigated the 9/11 Truth movement in order to determine how best to discredit it through misrepresentation.



© Photograph by Rob Howard / CORBIS

PM devotes an entire page to this dramatic photograph by Rob Howard showing Flight 175 approaching the South Tower. Unsupported claims that the plane was not a jetliner have been the staple of many critics' efforts to discredit the 9/11 Truth movement for over a year. The selection of this as the centerpiece image is one of an array of techniques *Popular Mechanics* uses to falsely identify the 9/11 Truth movement with a campaign cleverly used to discredit it through associating it with claims for which there is no evidence, such as the claim that Flight 175 carried a missile-firing pod under its wings.



What could have shredded so much steel and pulverized so much concrete, especially decimating the 47 massive steel columns of each tower? (See inset of original construction.)

THE MAIN ARTICLE consists of an introduction and four sections, each devoted to a topic, spanning six two-page spreads uninterrupted by advertising. The topics contain a total of sixteen *poisonous claims*, which *PM* purports to refute while it identifies them as the common beliefs of all in the *growing army of conspiracy theorists*. The four sections are:

- **THE PLANES**, in which *PM* uses nonsensical claims about the jet that crashed into the South Tower to discredit the valid claims pertaining to the incredible lack of military response to the attack.

Claim		PM's title	PM-cited sources
#1	straw man	<i>Where's The Pod?</i>	911InPlaneSite.com, LetsRoll911.org
#2		<i>No Stand-Down Order</i>	Emperors-Clothes.com, StandDown.net
#3		<i>Intercepts Not Routine</i>	OilEmpire.us
#4	straw man	<i>Flight 175's Windows</i>	911InPlaneSite.com

- **THE WORLD TRADE CENTER**, in which *PM* pretends to debunk the controlled demolition of the Twin Towers and Building 7 by advancing a series of red herring claims and misrepresenting the case for demolition.

Claim		PM's title	PM-cited sources
#5	probable straw man	<i>Widespread Damage</i>	SanDiego.indymedia.org
#6		<i>Puffs Of Dust</i>	Ad for Painful Questions
#7	straw man	<i>'Melted' Steel</i>	AttackOnAmerica.net
#8	straw man	<i>Seismic Spikes</i>	WhatReallyHappened.com, Prisonplanet.com
#9		<i>WTC 7 Collapse</i>	911Review.org

- **THE PENTAGON**, in which *PM* attacks the much debated claim of *conspiracy advocates* that the Pentagon was hit by an object other than a jetliner, while hiding the other equally held position of 9/11 Truth activists that this claim is a hoax.

Claim		PM's title	PM-cited sources
#10	probable straw man	<i>Big Plane, Small Holes</i>	ReOpen911.org
#11	straw man	<i>Flight 77 Debris</i>	PentagonStrike.co.uk
#12	probable straw man	<i>Intact Windows</i>	PentagonStrike.co.uk

- **FLIGHT 93**, in which *PM* attacks the claim that Flight 93 was shot down (by the US Air Force) with transparently specious arguments.

Claim		PM's title	PM-cited sources
#13	probable straw man	<i>The White Jet</i>	BlogD.com, WorldNetDaily.com
#14		<i>Roving Engine</i>	Rense.com
#15		<i>Indian Lake</i>	ThinkAndAsk.com, TheForbiddenKnowledge.com
#16	probable straw man	<i>F-16 Pilot</i>	The Alex Jones Show, LetsRoll911.org

What Is a Straw Man?

According to Wikipedia, a free on-line encyclopedia, in the rhetorical context, straw man describes a point of view or creates a bogus claim that can be easily defeated in an argument. The straw man technique does not debate the facts head on, but rather detours around them in order to make the opposing view unbelievable.

The *Popular Mechanics* article repeatedly uses the straw man technique by setting up, then disproving, false claims which it asserts are accepted by most or all 9/11 skeptics. In doing so, *PM* conceals the painstaking work of the 9/11 Truth movement, replacing it with a lurid caricature.

The article is perhaps the best example of how the straw man technique has been used to target the 9/11 Truth movement, but the strategy is not new. We believe that some 'researchers' have (wittingly or unwittingly) set up certain claims that are easily knocked down by our critics.

For example, the idea that holograms, not airplanes, were used to attack the World Trade Center towers, is clearly a bogus claim that 99.9% of all people would call absurd, thereby, turning off the inquisitive neophyte truth seeker from further investigation into what really happened. Persons who surreptitiously set up dummy targets, which can then be knocked down, are guilty of using this straw man tactic. The increasing use of this technique in attacking the 9/11 Truth movement is, we believe, an indication of our success in assembling a compelling and meticulously documented case disproving the Official Story. The *Popular Mechanics* article is a case study in how this deceptive technique is used.



SUPERFICIALLY, THE FOUR topics appear to address the major physical evidence issues brought up by the skeptics (while ignoring the mountains of evidence of foreknowledge, motive, and unique means possessed by insiders). However, the sixteen *most prevalent claims made by conspiracy theorists* which it attacks are mostly deceptive claims, many of which were probably invented to discredit skepticism of the official story in the first place. The article debunks the more specious claims, and uses distortion and falsehoods to counter serious claims. Thus the approach of the article is to set up and attack a hand-picked series of claims that it pretends represent the entirety of the skeptics' movement. The list includes many of the same claims that were already debunked in 2004 by some of our better websites: *911Review.com*, *OilEmpire.us*, and *QuestionsQuestions.net*.

PM provides no evidence for its assertion that the claims it attacks are representative of the *army of conspiracy theorists*. It cites at least one website for each of its claims, but the websites are not representative of the 9/11 Truth movement. It makes no mention of *911Research.wtc7.net*, the highest-ranking 9/11 Truth website returned by a Google search using '9/11'. In several cases the references are to anonymous posts on sites that don't exercise editorial control. The 17 websites *PM* mentions can be categorized into four types:

- Sites with a high profile in the 9/11 Truth movement that maintain a high standard of factual accuracy: *Emperors-Clothes.com*, *OilEmpire.us*, and *StandDown.net*.
- Sites with a high profile in the 9/11 Truth movement that post a wide range of articles or endorse positions without carefully vetting their accuracy: *Prisonplanet.com*, *Rense.com*, *WhatReallyHappened.com*, *ReOpen911.org*, and *AttackonAmerica.net*.
- Sites that most in our movement have never heard of, or don't focus on 9/11: *SanDiego.indymedia.org*, *BlogD.com*, *ThinkandAsk.com*, *TheForbiddenKnowledge.com*, and *WorldNetDaily.com*.
- Sites that have actively promoted hoaxes are: *911InPlaneSite.com*, *LetsRoll911.org*, *911Review.org*, and *PentagonStrike.co.uk*.

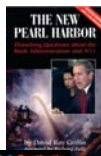
While entirely avoiding the most prominent 9/11 Truth sites, *PM* repeatedly mentions the least credible. For example, it repeats *LetsRoll911.org* three times.

Before proceeding to its 16 points, the article's introduction levels more insults at 9/11 skeptics, calling us *extremists*, some of whose theories are *by-products of cynical imaginations that aim to inject suspicion and animosity into public debate*. *PM* reminds the reader, lest they have forgotten Meig's sermon, that any questioning of the basic premise of the official story is beyond the pale. The sixteen 'claims' attacked by the article are described here under the headings taken from the article, which indicate either the claim, the counter-claim, or a broader issue.


High Profile 9/11 Truth Websites

<p>www.911Busters.com www.911Inquiry.org www.911Research.wtc7.net www.911Review.com www.911ShareTheTruth.org www.911Truth.org www.CommunityCurrency.org www.CooperativeResearch.org www.DeceptionDollar.com www.Emperors-Clothes.com www.FromTheWilderness.com www.GlobalResearch.ca</p>	<p>www.GlobalOutlook.ca www.Justicefor911.org www.NY911Truth.org www.OilEmpire.us www.QuestionsQuestions.net www.SeptemberEleventh.org www.StandDown.net www.SnowshoeFilms.com www.SummerofTruth.org www.UnansweredQuestions.org www.WTC7.net www.WTCEO.org</p>
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The Mounting Evidence (as displayed on our front cover)



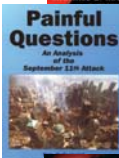
The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions and Distortions >
by David Ray Griffin




< *The New Pearl Harbor* by David Ray Griffin




< *Crossing the Rubicon* by Michael C. Ruppert >




< *9/11 Synthetic Terror: Made in USA* by Webster G. Tarpley



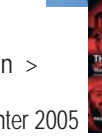
< *Painful Questions* by Eric Hufschmid >



< *Inside Job* by Jim Marrs



< *The Terror Timeline* by Paul Thompson >



< *Global Outlook* Issue #9 – Fall 2004 / Winter 2005