



# Sci-tech magazine gets down and dirty

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*Popular Mechanics*, South Africa's leading science and technology title, has just published a major article devoted to - wait for it - intimate encounters between humans and robots. As far as can be established, it's the first time in 106 years that the magazine has featured the word "sex" on its cover.



The article in question, titled "Sex With Machines", is extracted from a book by American writer David Levy, a recognised expert on artificial intelligence who describes a future in which humans and robots become very close indeed. Levy believes robots will have the capacity to make themselves romantically attractive and sexually desirable to humans, and even fall in love. His prediction? "Love and sex with robots on a grand scale is inevitable."

*Popular Mechanics* editor Alan Duggan, who admits to "having a thing about robots", says he is not entirely convinced that sex with machines is the way to go, citing such hurdles as public opprobrium - "in some people's minds, it's one step removed from intimacy with a blow-up doll" - to physiological incompatibility.

"Against that, recent advances in haptics (the technology of touch), together with people's willingness to embrace radically new concepts, suggest that we're getting there. We already know of people who talk to their cars and give pet names to their robotic vacuum cleaners, so it doesn't require a huge change in mindset."

Yes, but what about the sex thing? Could readers now expect to see a flood of smutty articles in future issues of PM? Duggan is firm on this one: "Absolutely not. Although we concede that smut is occasionally interesting, we will never become purveyors of rude how-to articles. Nor will we actively encourage fantasies involving sexually alluring domestic robots."

Also up for grabs in this month's issue of *Popular Mechanics* is a flash game that requires players to choose their weapon (tank or helicopter gunship) and shoot out the lights in the headquarters of a large - and strangely familiar - public utility. Oh, and there's more: to mark Father's Day, readers are offered a chance to win a TATA Xenon 4x4 double cab worth R199 000.

*Popular Mechanics* notched up a new sales record with its April issue, selling over 45 000 copies (its most recent ABC-certified sales figure was 40 212).

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