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APL Space Missions Garner *Popular Science* Top Technology Awards

by Mike Buckley

Two APL space missions focused on the solar system's extremes have earned spots on *Popular Science* magazine's "Best of What's New" list, which honors the year's most outstanding breakthrough products and technologies.

The Pluto-bound New Horizons mission and the twin STEREO solar-study probes were among the 100 new products and innovations selected from hundreds examined by the magazine. The missions were two of 12 selected in the Aviation and Space category.

"The New Horizons mission was a clear Best of What's New winner because it's the first mission to Pluto and the Kuiper Belt, a region of the solar system with far too many questions and not enough answers," says *Popular Science* Executive Editor **Michael Moyer**. "In addition, we were impressed by the sheer numbers of the attempt: 36,000 miles per hour [leaving Earth], and a flyby of Jupiter in just over a year after launch."

STEREO won the honor, he adds, because of its innovative two-craft strategy to create a binocular view of the sun. Both missions are featured in the December 2006 issue of *Popular Science* and on the Web at www.popsci.com/popsci/flat/bown/2006/index.html (click on the "Aviation and Space" image).

On Jan. 19 New Horizons became the fastest spacecraft ever launched, and this February it will fly past Jupiter for a gravity assist toward Pluto. New Horizons will zip by Pluto and its moons in July 2015, then head deeper into the Kuiper Belt for possible looks at other, smaller Pluto-like worlds.

The twin STEREO spacecraft, launched on Oct. 25, will explore the origin, evolution and interplanetary consequences of coronal mass ejections. These powerful solar eruptions are a major source of the magnetic disruptions on Earth and a key component of space weather, which can greatly affect satellite operations, communications, power systems, and the lives of astronauts in space.

New Horizons and STEREO mark the Lab's return trip to *Popular Science*'s top technology list; the NEAR mission to asteroid Eros was among the 100 best innovations of 1996 and 2001, recognized as the first spacecraft to orbit and land on an asteroid.

