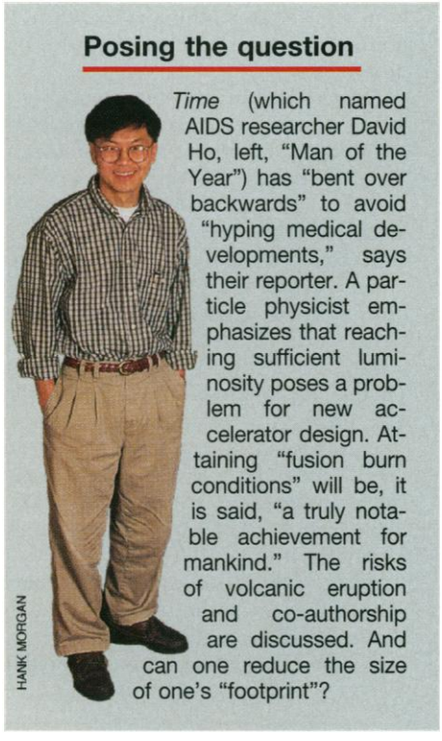
LETTERS



"Man of the Year"

I know it's quite fashionable to declare that the mainstream media never get anything right, but Jon Cohen's article "The media's love affair with AIDS research: Hope vs. hype" (News & Comment, 17 Jan., p. 298) really goes overboard trying to make this point. Indeed, by lumping together *Time*'s lengthy and carefully nuanced cover package on David Ho as "Man of the Year" with stories that "cross the line that separates hope from hype," the article is guilty of the very sin you accuse us of having committed—oversimplifying.

Selecting "Man of the Year" is about making news, not conferring honor. Anyone who has been following AIDS research knows that 1996 was an exciting year and that Ho's posing of the question "Can HIV be eradicated from the body?" galvanized the community. We at *Time* thought it important to bring this story to our readers.

We were also quite aware that our choice of David Ho as "Man of the Year" might lead some to the false conclusion that AIDS is now all but cured. That is why we made sure that none of the headlines in our 25-page package oversold the story.

Did we do "backflips," as Cohen puts it, in our writing? We sure did. We bent over backwards to make sure that our readers understood that Ho's experiments do not represent the cure. We bent over backwards to make sure they understood that combination therapy is only a stop-gap measure for most people in the later stages of infection. We bent over backwards to make sure they understood that Ho is not the only AIDS researcher in the world. I don't know how anyone who read our package could come away with the "possible impression that Ho is responsible for today's drug cocktails" when we explicitly credited the pharmaceutical industry with doing that work and even spotlighted the late Merck biochemist Irving Sigal, who, with his colleagues, determined the molecular structure of protease.

Is the popular press guilty at times of hyping medical developments? You bet it is. But *Time*'s 1996 "Man of the Year" package is part of the solution, not the problem.

Christine Gorman
Staff Writer, Time,
Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020, USA

■

Particle Physics Pessimism

Dennis Normile, in the first paragraph of his article "More powerful pulses please and puzzle" (Research News, 24 Jan., p. 481), suggests, as do the authors of many articles about results from frontier acceleration techniques, that major progress is being made in developing accelerators that can be used for particle physics. Particle physicists would be delighted if that were so. However, even if the sorts of problems that are discussed in the article can be solved, many units have to be linked coherently to reach the high energies that would be useful for particle physics, and that raises new problems. Most important, in order to be useful for particle physics, a high energy accelerator must also have very high luminosity, because the cross sections for events of interest decrease with increasing energy. No technique I have seen discussed has demonstrated that it can get within orders of magnitude of the needed luminosity. Rather than raise false hopes in the science policy community, it would be better to not discuss the particle physics application until the values for the energy and