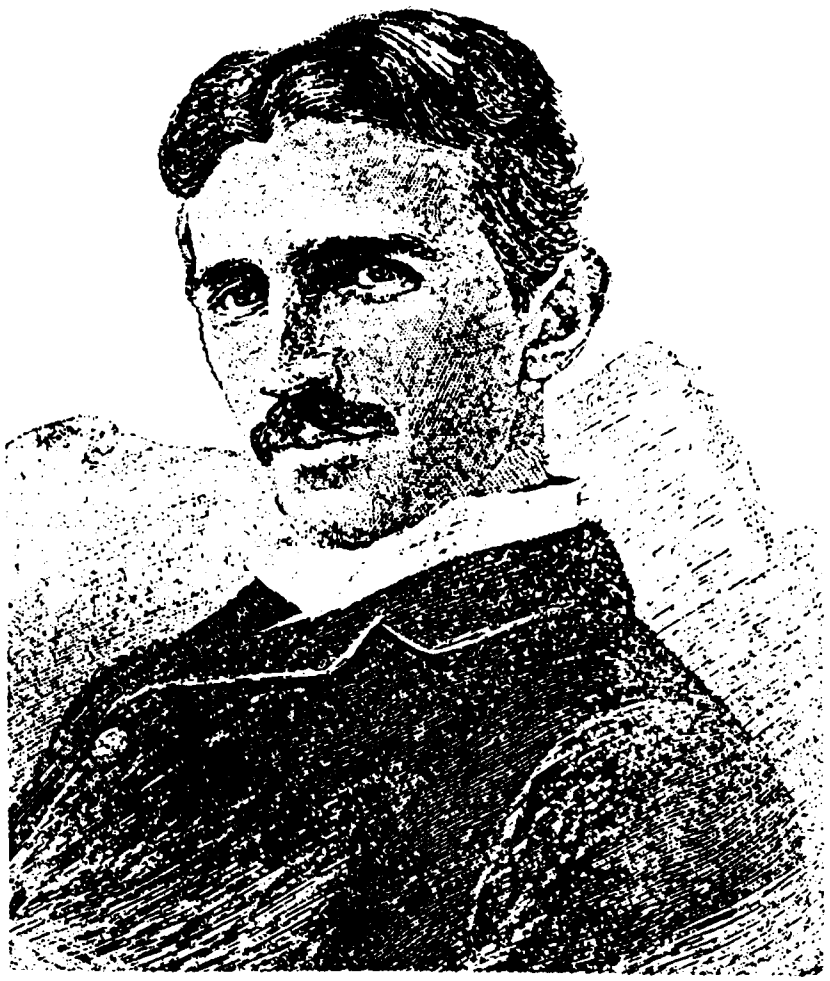
# Tesla's "Self-Acting" Engine

## by Peter A. Lindemann



IN June of the year 1900, Nikola Tesla published an article in **Century Magazine** titled *The Problems of Increasing Human Energy*. Never be fore or since has there been such a masterful and exhaustive discussion of how to extract useful energy from the environment. In its original magazine format, this article is 31 pages in length. After discussing every known method for energy generation then in use, Tesla begins a discussion of "a departure from known methods – possibility of a 'self-acting' engine – the ideal way of obtaining motive power".

Beginning on page 200, and continuing to page 204 of the original Century Magazine article, Tesla outlines his ideas. The following quotations are extracted from this section of the article.

"...a survey of the various ways of utilizing the energy of the medium convinced me, ..that to arrive at a practical solution, a radical departure from the methods then known had to be made. The windmill, the solar engine, the engine driven by terrestrial heat, had their limitations in the amount of power obtainable. Some new way had to be discovered which would enable us to get more energy."

"..the problem was to discover some new method which would make it possible both to utilize more of the heat-energy of the medium and also to draw it away from the same at a more rapid rate."

"I was vainly endeavoring to form an idea of how this might be accomplished, when I read some statements from Carnot and Lord Kelvin which meant virtually that it is impossible for an inanimate mechanism or *self-acting machine to cool a portion of the medium below the temperature of the surrounding, and operate by the heat extracted.* These statements interested me intensely. Evidently, a living being could do this very thing, and since the experiences of my early life...convinced me that a living being is only an automaton, or, otherwise stated, a 'self-acting engine,' I came to the conclusion that it was possible to construct a machine which would do the same."

"Suppose that an extremely low temperature could be maintained by some process in a given space; the surrounding medium would then be compelled to give off heat, which could be converted into mechanical or other form of energy, and utilized. By realizing such a plan, we should be enabled to get at any point of the globe a continuous supply of energy, day and night."

"A closer investigation of the principles involved, and calculation, now showed that the result I aimed at could not be reached in a practical manner by ordinary machinery, as I had in the beginning expected. This led me, as a next step, to the study of a type of engine generally designated as 'turbine,' which at first seemed to offer better chances for a realization of the idea."

"..my conclusions showed that if an engine of a peculiar kind could be brought to a high degree of perfection, the plan I had conceived was realizable, and I resolved to proceed with the development of such an engine, the primary object of which was to secure the greatest economy of transformation of heat into mechanical energy."

"(In early 1895) Dr. Carl Linde announced the liquefaction of air by a self-cooling process, demonstrating that it was practicable to proceed with the cooling until liquefaction of air took place. This was the only experimental proof which I was still wanting that energy was obtainable from the medium in the manner contemplated by me."

"Much of this task on which I have labored so long remains to be done. A number of mechanical details are still to be perfected and some difficulties of a different nature to be mastered, and I cannot

hope to produce a self-acting machine deriving energy from the ambient medium for a long time yet, even if all my expectations should materialize."

Tesla's idea was radical. Design a machine powered by the heat resident in the ambient air that produced an output of mechanical energy and refrigeration simultaneously. He called it "the ideal way of obtaining motive power". Such a machine would be able to produce useful energy at any time of the day or night, at any location on the globe, drawing upon the vast heat reservoir of the atmosphere. He worked for years toward this goal and absolutely convinced himself, by the power of his own nearly infallible logic, of its potential reality.

To my knowledge, Tesla never finished the work on this invention. But his pioneering efforts clearly conceived the idea, as well as outlined most of the engineering problems to be solved.

It's remarkable to me, that with all of the attention given to Nikola Tesla in the last few years, I have not heard any mention of this aspect of his work. Volumes have been written on so-called "free energy" devices, wherein the would-be inventors are searching in vain for a ubiquitously present, inexhaustible source of energy from which their machines may draw. Imaginative theories have postulated "tachyons", "zero-points", and "magnetism" as the source of choice from which to extract energy. And, while future work may prove that these sources can be made practical, it is still surprising that the most readily available, untapped source of energy from which to draw, atmospheric heat, has been all but neglected.

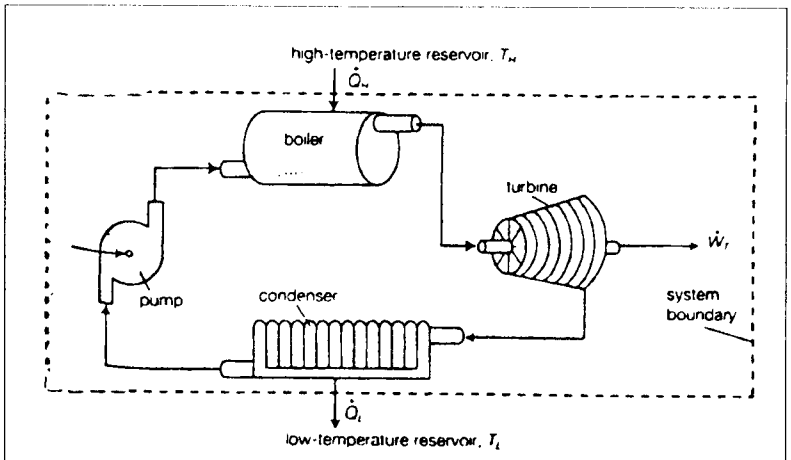


Figure 1 - Steam Engine

The patent office is crammed with hundreds of "permanent magnet motors", none of which work, to my knowledge. Tesla dismisses these ideas with a short stroke, "We may even find ways of applying forces such as magnetism or gravity for driving machinery without using any other means. Such realizations, while highly improbable, are not impossible." While leaving the door open, Tesla considers this area of research worthy of only a brief mention. He then goes on for four pages, discussing his efforts to tap the ambient temperature as a source of power.

Tesla was a master thinker and inventor. His mind penetrated the ultimate solution to humanity's energy needs. Like a scientific Sherlock Holmes using the power of his own deduction, when all of the "improbables" and "impossibles" were removed, what remained must be the solution. Atmospheric heat was the largest untapped reservoir of energy on the planet. Tesla refused to overlooked the obvious. He was that rare fish capable of contemplating the water he was swimming in. Few were able to follow his ideas. Even fewer were able to follow-up on his work

When I first read this article from **Century Magazine**, I was fascinated by the section on the "self-acting" engines. But Tesla's idea of gaining energy by dumping heat into an inexhaustible "cold spot" seemed unrealizable. My mind could not penetrate the unknowns involved. Luckily, other minds were not so dull.

To begin to get an understanding of Tesla's idea, let's first look at the fundamentals of fluid dynamics. Follow along if you can. If a gaseous fluid (like air) is confined in a closed space, three properties of this gas become interdependent upon each other. These properties are: 1) Volume, how much space it occupies, 2) Temperature, how much heat it contains, and 3) Pressure, how much force it exerts on the walls of the container. For instance, if the container remains the same size and we increase the temperature of the air inside, the pressure it exerts on the walls also rises. Likewise, if the volume stays the same and we reduce the pressure, the temperature must also drop. Conversely, if we increase the volume, either the temperature or the pressure will go down (or both). From this we may see that temperature and pressure are directly related to each other, but are inversely related to the volume. This is how Dr. Carl Linde liquefied air by his "self-cooling" process. By manipulating the pressure and volume of a quantity of gaseous air, he was able to liquefy some of it by taking advantage of these principles.

One hundred years ago, this was an amazing accomplishment. Now, these processes are used commercially every day. To illustrate, we need go no further than a useful novelty available in a mail order catalog. Many compressed gases are available today. One of them is carbon dioxide. For less than $30, you can buy a special nozzle that attaches to a canister of compressed carbon dioxide. When the gas is released through this nozzle, "dry ice" is formed. Room temperature compressed carbon dioxide, when allowed to expand rapidly under controlled conditions, refrigerates itself to form "dry ice". By this method, about 20% of the compressed gas can be liquefied, or in this case, solidified. This illustrates what Tesla refers to as the "self-cooling" process that allowed Dr. Carl Linde to liquefy air in 1895. Tesla immediately understood the implications. He states that his invention could be designed to run on liquid air, but that "its temperature is unnecessarily low." All that was needed was a working fluid that changed from a gas to a liquid at a temperature below the ambient.

Dr. Linde's process required a mechanical energy input to compress the air. But Tesla knew that mechanical processes were reversible. The machine he envisioned used the methods discovered by Dr. Linde, but ran them backwards. To understand how this can be done, we need go no further than our own medicine cabinet. If room temperature isopropyl alcohol is rubbed on your

arm, it "feels cold". It feels cold because it is evaporating. It is evaporating because of a change in "vapor pressure" between the closed bottle and the open air. This change of pressure is "forcing" the evaporation to take place. But, for the alcohol to evaporate (change from a liquid to a gas), it needs heat. Since no heat source is available, it must get the necessary heat from the immediate environment. So, it extracts that heat from your arm. That's why your arm feels cold (refrigeration). Believe it or not, Tesla saw an energy machine in all of this. The one part of the equation that is not so apparent here, is that the volume of space occupied by the evaporating alcohol is increasing dramatically. This increasing volume of gas could be confined to form a pressure that could drive an engine. Tesla saw it all, and knew what it meant. He spent years trying to solve all of the engineering problems associated with it, so that a future society could have all of its energy needs supplied by these processes.

So, what does Tesla's "self-acting" engine really look like? In order to visualize this, it may be helpful first to review the workings of two different kinds of heat systems that operate on "two phase fluids"; the first is a steam engine and the second is a heat pump. In Figure 1, water is boiled in the boiler to become pressurized steam. This high temperature, high pressure steam is then used to drive a turbine engine to convert the vapor pressure into mechanical work. The low temperature, low pressure steam coming out of the turbine is then allowed to cool further in the condenser, becoming liquid water again. The liquid water is then pumped back into the boiler, and the cycle begins again. In this example, we can easily see that the system takes in heat at the boiler and gives off heat at the condenser.

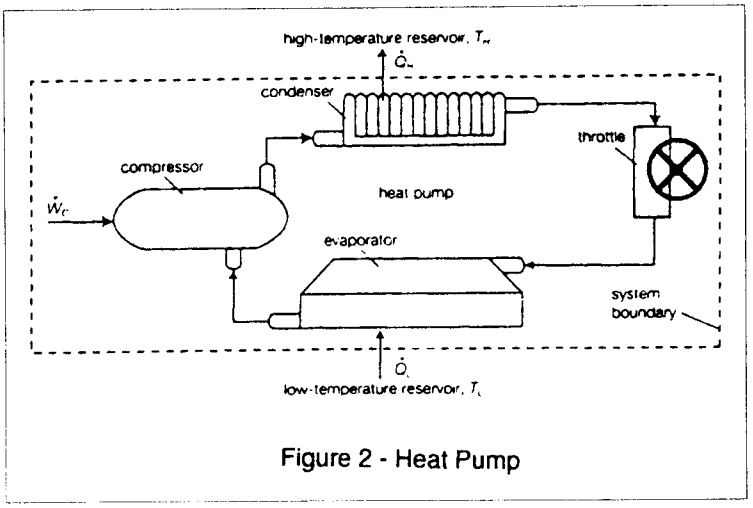


Figure 2 - Heat Pump

Figure 2 is a diagram of a heat pump. Low temperature vapor enters the compressor and is compressed to a high pressure and temperature. This vapor is then condensed to a liquid in the condenser. Then, the pressurized liquid is throttled through a special nozzle to low pressure and temperature. Releasing the pressure allows some of the liquid to vaporize. This "two phase fluid", part liquid and part vapor, now enters the evaporator, in which the remaining liquid is boiled. The resultant low temperature vapor then enters the compressor, completing the cycle. In this example, we can see that the system takes in heat at the evaporator and gives off heat at the condenser.

There is a high degree of similarity between these two systems. Both have a location where heat is absorbed (boiler and evaporator). Both have a location where the pressure is released (turbine and throttle). Both have a location where heat is released (condensers). And both have a location where the working fluid is pressurized to complete the cycle (pump and compressor). In the steam engine, heat energy is added to the system at the boiler and mechanical energy is removed from the system at the turbine. That amount of heat that was not successfully transformed to mechanical energy at the turbine, is then thrown away at the condenser and represents a loss of efficiency. In the heat pump, mechanical energy is added to the system at the compressor and heat energy is removed from the system at the condenser. That amount of liquid that vaporizes at the throttle represents a loss of efficiency because no heat is absorbed from the environment to create the vaporization.

The main difference between these two systems is that the steam engine runs on a working fluid (water) that changes phase from a liquid to a gas at 212° Fahrenheit, whereas the heat pump runs on a working fluid (freon) that changes phase from a liquid to a gas at -50° Fahrenheit. Tesla's "self-acting" engine was a unique hybrid between these two systems.

Tesla knew that his system, if it was to work, had to be much more efficient than standard systems. In our steam engine example, for instance, if we could eliminate the condenser, the system would be more efficient. In our heat pump example, if we integrated the throttle into the evaporator so that all of the expansion happened there, the system would be more efficient. These are the kinds of engineering problems Tesla was attempting to solve.

By taking elements from both of these systems, we can begin to understand what Tesla had discovered. Figure 3 shows such a system. It runs on a low temperature phase change material, like freon. The first element acts like a combination of the pump and the compressor. Its job is to take the "two phase fluid", part liquid and part vapor, and compress it until it is 100% liquid. The next element of the system takes the place of the boiler. It is really a heat exchanger that allows the working fluid to absorb heat from the environment *without* boiling. On the outside, this element gets cold and produces refrigeration effects. On the inside, the working fluid is gaining in its stored heat potential. The next element of the system is the throttle or control valve. This component allows the pressurized, liquid material to experience a rapid pressure drop that promotes instant vaporization of *some* of the working fluid. Since no heat source is available here, the heat of vaporization must come from the stored heat in the working fluid itself. This rapidly expanding vapor/liquid combination is then harnessed by the next element of the system, the turbine. As Tesla said, this is "an engine of a peculiar kind." It must be able to efficiently operate on the part vapor, part liquid material coming through it. When the volumetric expansion is spent, the "two phase fluid" is then re-compressed to a liquid, and the cycle starts over. Tesla envisioned that his turbine would produce more mechanical energy than the compressor required, so that the system would produce a net gain of mechanical energy.

Unlike the two previously discussed systems, Tesla's "self-acting" engine has no condenser where unused heat is thrown away. Heat energy is absorbed from the ambient, mechanical energy is removed from the turbine and all of the remaining heat potential in the working fluid is recycled for the next go-round.

The whole thing is an amazing idea, but will it work? Can the necessary efficiencies actually be attained? In the 1930's, an Austrian engineer named Rudolf Doczekal successfully built a steam engine that ran on a combination of water and benzene. To his amazement, it could run with or without the condenser in the system. Its efficiency was well above the calculated Carnot Cycle maximum. He was granted a Patent on this system in 1939 (NR. 155744). It took 39 years, and someone else to prove it, but Tesla was right; a high efficiency heat engine could be run without a condenser.

But can all of the other efficiencies be attained? Is there a device that can efficiently compress the "two phase fluid" back to a liquid? The answer is yes. Today, the Copeland Scroll Compressor can perform this function. Is there a turbine that can run efficiently on the rapidly expanding "two phase fluid?" Again, the answer is yes. Impulse turbines with the pressure nozzles built directly into the housing can perform this function, so that all of the fluid expansion occurs inside the engine. In fact, all of the other engineering problems have been solved.

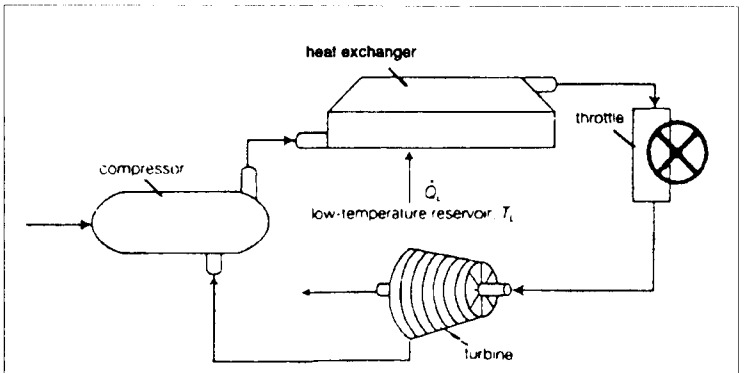


Figure 3 - Tesla's "Self-Acting" Engine

Today there are working models of machines that convert the ambient temperature of the air into mechanical energy, while creating refrigeration as a by-product. One hundred years after Tesla identified the "ideal way of gaining motive power", the gigantic reservoir of atmospheric heat has been successfully tapped. Real "free energy" has arrived on planet Earth. Obviously, the working details of these machines are complicated. The average reader will not have a thorough understanding of them without considerable study. Still, the basic principles upon which they operate have been outlined here with only minor over-simplification.

As of June, 1995, there are two slightly different processes being pursued that give the same basic result. The first is a machine designed by a German physicist, Dr. Bernhard Schaeffer, along with a Russian inventor, Albert Serogodski, building on the pioneering work of Doczekal. Their latest machine has been granted German Patent # DE 42 44 016 A 1, and is capable of being embodied as a refrigerator that produces electricity rather than consumes it. The other development is based on the work of Canadian engineer, George Wiseman, building more directly on Tesla's ideas. Wiseman has written three books that fully outline the principles of this amazing invention. His **HEAT Technology Series, Book 1, Book 2,** and **Book 3** are must reading for anyone interested in this subject. In these books, turbine designs are explored along with complete mathematical models of the system. For copies of these books, write to: Eagle Research, Box 145, Eastport, ID, 83826 USA. Each book is $15, post paid in North America. Add $5 more for over-seas postage. Buy both books, as they cover different aspects of the system.

One hundred years ago, Nikola Tesla discovered the ultimate way to harness the energy of the sun by converting the ambient temperature of the air into mechanical energy. He outlined the entire method and even solved many of the difficulties himself. But forces during his lifetime prevented him from completing this work. His "self-acting" engine is a true fuel-less power plant, capable of producing useful energy at any location on the planet, at any time of the day or night. It has taken one hundred years for others to finally complete this work, but that day has now arrived. While I do not wish to minimize the irreplaceable and outstanding contributions by Wiseman, Schaeffer, Doczekal and others, still, it is to Tesla that the future owes its thanks once again.

When Tesla first conceived of this invention, he started by deciding that the basic assumptions embodied in the "Second Law of Thermodynamics" were not universally true and therefore could not act as an absolute limiting case. These assumptions are built into our lives today by the idea that if I want the temperature of my environment to be either warmer or cooler than the ambient, I have to expend energy to do it. Tesla was not afraid to question or even disagree with these assumptions. Even the stature and historic "authority" of Sadi Carnot and Lord Kelvin, whose work was the basis of the "Laws of Thermodynamics", did not intimidate him. He was willing to rethink all of the fundamentals in the light of his own experiments and insight, and draw his own conclusions. By doing so, he was able to conceive of an invention that has taken 100 years to create. ■

## REFERENCES

*Encyclopedia Britannica*, section on Thermodynamics, 1989 edition

Planetary Association for Clean Energy, *PACE Newsletter*, Vol. 8, #2, Feb., 1995

Schaeffer, B and Bauer, W. D., *How to win energy with an adiabatic-isochoric-adiabatic cycle over labile states of the P-V-diagram*, WDB-Verlag, 1991

Tesla, Nikola, *The Problems of Increasing Human Energy*, **The Century Illustrated monthly Magazine**, June, 1900

Wisemann, George, **Heat Technology, Books 1, 2, and 3**, Eagle Research, 1994

PETER LINDEMANN became interested in alternative energy and health technologies in 1973. He joined BSRF in 1975, studying Radionics, Bio-circuits, implosion, and related subjects. His first article was published in BORDERLANDS in 1986 on ELF devices. In 1988, he joined the Board of Directors of BSRF as well as helped supervise research at Borderland Labs. Since that time he has written 14 Fizix Korner columns, and contributed numerous articles on MWO research, Radionics, and Free Energy.