

Foster's Daily Democrat

'Rock star engineers' Brothers make Popular Science cover for inventing super tank



By [Jason Claffey](#)

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ELIOT, Maine — Inventors/military contractors/ "rock-star engineers" Geoff and Mike Howe were on the phone with their mother earlier this week when the June issue of Popular Science hit newsstands. Deidre Howe had bought the twin brothers a subscription when they were 6 years old; 28 years later, one of her boys' inventions was going to be featured on the cover.

They listened in as she walked into the Barnes and Noble in Bangor, picked up a copy with their Ripsaw tank on it, and promptly started crying.

"She was so proud. I started crying, too," said Mike, his clothes splattered with grease, sparks flying behind him as he stood in his workshop Tuesday. "It was a little emotional."

Geoff, who admitted he got misty eyed as well, added: "She's said, 'I can't believe my sons are on the cover of Popular Science' ... to hear your mom say that ... it hit home."

If the Howe brothers aren't internationally known by now, the Popular Science cover will certainly help them get there. The magazine, a leading authority on science and technology news, has a circulation of 1.3 million and is distributed to dozens of countries.

The Ripsaw, an unmanned ground vehicle the brothers developed for the Army, was trumpeted by the magazine as "Tomorrow's Tank." It won one of the magazine's annual invention awards, and is featured in a three-page spread. Editor Mark Jannot called the brothers "rock-star engineers," as the brothers started work on the tank in their garage when they were 25.

The brothers said they were humbled by the feature.

"I'm utterly speechless," Geoff said. "We've been reading this magazine since we were young."

The cover story is another in a series of milestones for the pair, owners of Eliot-based Howe and Howe Technologies. The Ripsaw has become known as the world's fastest tank, reaching speeds upward of 60 mph. (The Army is currently developing it for possible use in Iraq or Afghanistan.)

Last year, the brothers developed the Badger — officially the world's smallest tank, according to Guinness World Records — for the Las Vegas Metro SWAT team.

This year, they developed the SR-1, a personnel carrier for miners in Alabama that can withstand cratered terrain, fireball blasts and cave-ins.

They are currently working on an advanced version of the Ripsaw, as well as a large-scale model dubbed "Rolling Thunder" they hope can be used at exhibitions like monster truck rallies. Also, they are developing a larger version of SR-1. Needless to say, they have enough to keep them busy. So much so, in fact, they are trying to move to a bigger location in southern Maine.

Holding a copy of Popular Science with the Ripsaw on the cover, Geoff reflected on their success. The brothers started Howe and Howe Technologies in 2006; now, they employ 16 people and have secured both military and civilian contracts.

"It doesn't seem real some days," he said. "We're proud and grateful."

Another "unreal" development could be the Ripsaw featured in the new "Mad Max" movie. Hollywood producers are in talks with the brothers to use the vehicle in the film, though nothing has been made official. It does, however, leave open the possibility of the Ripsaw being on the cover of another magazine: "Entertainment Weekly," perhaps.

"That'd be good, huh?" Geoff said.

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