


**IRENE
VIRAG**

The vacuum swept me off my feet

The reception bubbles inside a big yellow ball-like tent that looks as if it has just bounced into place on West 62nd Street. After an hour featuring champagne, Pellegrino, sushi and technological exhibits involving G-force, microbiology, dust mites and pet dander, the lights dim. Drums pound. A troupe of black-clad dancers appears in a glowing loft. The dancers roll large and small yellow balls up and down their arms as they contort — their synchronized images playing on plasma screens.

The music changes, the dancers vanish. And poof — as if right out of a television commercial, there they are. The man and his machine. James Dyson and the DC 15.

They make a handsome couple — the tall, slim Brit with short gray-white hair, rumpled slacks, linen jacket, soft-soled shoes. And the sleek, robotic machine, made of the sort of strong plastic used for airplane windows and motorcycle helmets. In a glossy color combo of yellow and steel. But look, Ma, no wheels. Instead, there's a ball at the bottom.

They dance down a ramp into the crowd, James Dyson and his latest vacuum cleaner. Like all his vacuums, the DC 15 doesn't lose suction. It doesn't have a bag. The big change is the ball.

Dyson waltzes along with his dust-destroying partner, guiding it with one hand, then the other, rolling the vacuum between his legs, pivoting it around the edges of the ramp. "First we got rid of the bag," he says, "now we've gotten rid of the wheels. It took three years to develop. It has 182 patents."

He smiles gently. "Welcome to our ball," he says. The media crowd applauds. This is bad form for the press, but I figure they're mostly magazine people. Not that I'm anyone to talk — I'm wearing a ball-shaped name tag like all the rest.

Dyson keeps dancing. And talking. "You'll find the maneuvering very different. With a movement of your wrist, the vacuum goes around tables and chairs. Instead of the vacuum controlling you, you control it."

"Be still my heart," I think.

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James Dyson demonstrates his DC 15 vacuum, which moves on a ball rather than wheels.

Swept off her feet by a vacuum

VIRAG from B13

I've always thought of vacuuming as a war. Not between me and the dust. Between me and the vacuum.

It didn't matter whether the vacuum was an upright or a canister. Hostilities started in childhood with a Kirby upright that took animal shape the minute the bag inflated. I loved stepping on the pedals that allowed me to adjust it for bare floors or rugs, but as soon as the Kirby and I got close to a wall, we were doing battle. Usually, the vacuum won. Instead of cleaning the rug, I'd bang into a baseboard or scuff the wall.

When I went out on my own, I rebelled against the old shibboleths. I stopped making my bed every day, or at least stopped bothering with hospital corners. I embraced lox and bagels. I moved to Boston and became an ice hockey fan.

And I switched from an upright vacuum to a canister.

It wasn't just rebellion. My residences as an adult were studios and small apartments, where the canister was much easier to store than an upright. My first canister had the

suction capability of a broken straw, but the ones that followed have been fairly good cleaners. Now, even though I have a house and closets, I still use a canister — a sturdy Sears Kenmore that even survived abuse from a contractor who sucked up plasterboard with it and left the poor thing permanently decorated with globs of white stuff. But I'm in conflict with the coil, and the canister bumps into furniture. And changing the bag is no joy.

So, you can imagine my flutter when Dyson hands the DC 15 to me and says, "Would you like to try it?"

The vacuum is a better dance partner than my husband — certainly much more responsive. A flick of the wrist, and I can change directions. I can take it anywhere around the room. I never even touched a side of the 90-by-80-foot ball-like tent.

And it seems to me that the DC 15 is doing a smooth and thorough cleaning job, although the rug we're on is in good shape to begin with. Basically, Dyson's "cyclone" technology spins dirt, dust and Barbie shoes into a clogless foam filter. All you have

to do is rinse the filter occasionally and make sure it's completely dry before reinstalling it.

The 57-year-old inventor sees the DC 15 as a logical next step around the rooms of our lives. "We started with a little wheel," he tells me, "but it kept flopping over, so we came up with the idea of a ball. It was an odd-looking prototype, but it worked. The ball rotates around the motor. It was a very challenging design."

Dyson was in his 20s when he came up with his first vacuum. "I'm in vacuums for life," he says. "If you vacuum — if you hate the machine you're using, it affects you and your home. Once you use the ball, you can't go back — anything else will feel awkward."

"I still vacuum," he says. "It's something my wife and I share."

As I leave, the man in the rumpled gray jacket is back on the floor, dancing gracefully with his vacuum cleaner.

The suggested retail price for the DC 15 is \$599.99. I'm saving up. I'm not putting down my canister, but who wouldn't like vacuuming to be a ball?

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