first model airplane to use air pressure in conjunction with a piston to power its propeller.” But it is only the latest of what must literally have been thousands of such ventures.

Bert Striegler
Rochelle, Tex.

While it’s true that compressed-air engine model airplanes have been around for decades, they were primarily enjoyed by airplane hobbyists. The Air Hogs plane is the first efficient-engine model to ever be mass-produced and marketed as a toy for the general public.

Standing Up to Hurricanes

WHILE I FOUND “The House That Beats Hurricanes” [Nov.] to be incredible, houses in Guam survive frequent typhoons with minimal damage—and without such multi-million-dollar technology. Instead, we simply use concrete. Concrete is inexpensive and proven and ought to be considered more strongly by people who live in the paths of such storms. After all, thousands of people surviving vicious storms year after year can’t be wrong.

Roddy Oaks
Chalan Pago, Guam

Exploding Bubbles

YOUR ARTICLE on sonoluminescence, the transformation of sound into light, stated that this phenomenon was discovered in 1933 [“Star in a Jar,” Dec.]. But sonoluminescence had been the unrecognized secret behind the financial success of Alfred Nobel—the founder of the Nobel prize—a half century before that. Nobel’s success was primarily based on his discovery of nitroglycerin-based dynamite—and although no one realized it at the time, sonoluminescence is what makes nitroglycerin explode. A pressure wave is formed in nitroglycerin by dropping it, or by a blasting cap, after which bubbles form. These bubbles then implode when the reflected pressure wave hits them, and emit a flash of light—or sonoluminescence. Only then does the explosion occur.

Hence, one could say that all Nobel prizes are due to sonoluminescence.

Kirk McDonald
Princeton, N.J.

Conflicting Forces

WASHINGTON machines don’t use centrifugal force [“Agitators Keep Out,” What’s New, Nov.]. Centrifugal force is just a perception in a rotating frame of reference. Following Newton’s first law, the water moves outward and continues its motion in a straight line unless an inward force (the wall of the washer’s tub) acts on it—the centripetal force.

Brenna R. Toblan
Calgary, Alberta, Canada

A Grand Purchase

YOUR GRAND WINNER for home technology—the Nighthawk electrochemical carbon monoxide detector—in “The Best of What’s New” [Dec.] caught my eye. I recently purchased 400 of this exact detector.

I work at the Naval Air Station in Pensacola, Florida. Last month, we had an accident at a housing complex in Mississippi. CO was suspected, and I was charged with inspecting 400 furnaces and providing CO detectors. After extensive searching, I settled on the Nighthawk. I consider it the Cadillac of CO detectors because of its easy installation, low price, and high quality. We will likely purchase detectors for other facilities, and I will certainly recommend we stay with the Nighthawk.

Christian Egeland
Pensacola, Fla.

 Corrections: The Hobie Mirage kayak [“The Best of What’s New,” Dec.] retails for $1,195.