

The Plenary Speaker

A high-level conference can only be a High-Level Conference if it is able to ensure the attendance of some stars from the field, who will serve as strong magnets to attract a big crowd of attendees, and thus make the event a success.

Plenary Speakers are very well known for their brilliant accomplishments, be it sometimes long ago.

They know how to give a fascinating show without too much preparation, helped by their collaborators who love to bring them their latest results provided that they are cited during the talk. The *Plenary Speaker* can be either formally dressed (European style, to underscore the fact that he *really* is an magnificent choice) or very casually (US style, to show that he knows how to connect with the young).

Before the readers start shouting at us for being male chauvinists by writing *he* when referring to the Plenary speaker, and not *he/she* (or, even better: *she/he*), let us be clear: It is unfair and unfortunate, but almost always the Plenary Speaker is a he. It's even worse. Plenary Speakers form a small panel of men rushing between conferences that have been wisely chosen by their wives for their nice beaches or good shopping.

During the talk, it is the charm, the style, the changing rhythm and the jokes which make the talk a smashing success, more so than the slides. Except for fascinating video shots: STM images of atoms dancing a tango along a perfect crystal surface, for example. And should the talk be incomprehensible: no problem. Undoubtedly, there will be another chance to hear the same talk once again at some other conference.

Plenary Speakers are busy. In fact, they are so busy that they usually can't attend the whole conference. It is difficult for ordinary scientists to find an opportunity to exchange even a single idea with them. Joined by their wife, they arrive the day before the talk, around lunchtime if the place is worth visiting. Otherwise even later, but making sure not to miss the excellent dinner offered by the Conference Chairperson. It is out of the question to pay for hotel or meals. Of course, they talk for free, but it happens

that the conference treasurer may reimburse the plane ticket in cash. After all, the registration fees may be used as a perfect cash machine, but who cares? The simple, well-publicized fame and presence of the *Plenary Speaker* has brought more attendees, and therefore much more cash than the ticket costs. It is so easy to make everybody happy! ■



▶ Editor's note

Our favourite author of "Physics in daily life", Jo Hermans, also Science Editor of EPN, is taking some rest and will save his contributions for the time being. "Europhysics News" wishes to continue to bring smile to readers'

faces so the Editors will attempt to fill the section with a series of short texts, serious or not. Let us start here with a "portrait", illustrated by our regular cartoonist, Wiebke Drenckhan. Nobody will ever recognize himself or

herself here, of course!

Our readers are most welcome to submit contributions, knowing that we keep our absolute power of (arbitrary) decision about their publication and illustration.