

What's In a Meme?

Rosetta Mission mixes with Maxon, Kim K for one unforgettable photo

Erik Schmidt, Assistant Editor

It was a perilous — some would even say *impossible* — undertaking, but on November 12, 2014, Maxon Motor braved the hazardous expanses of space and landed on that mammoth, brownish surface previously untouched by European space vessels.

Maxon had gone where no motor company had gone before:

Kim Kardashian's backside.

And all at once, as the Photoshopped image of a tiny *Rosetta* space probe rested unceremoniously on the — *ahem* — profound posterior of Kanye West's wife, it was clear that Maxon had made it BIG. In a scientific, pioneering sense, of course. But also in the social media-istic, meme-tastic sense (a "meme," by the way, is defined as "an idea, behavior, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture") that transcends the usually constrictive parameters of the power transmission industry and into the boundless world that exists *out there*.

Where?

There.

The place that doesn't forget even when most people do; the place that will live on, powered by "likes" and page views, when we're all dead and in the ground and resting eternally under the all-knowing Cloud.

Yes, Maxon is now a permanent inhabitant of Viral Village, the Internet Age's version of the Hamptons.

But well before that, before Maxon became a buzzword that filled Twitter timelines and Facebook status updates, it was simply a company from Switzerland that made motors, drives and systems of up to 500 W.

Talk about humble beginnings.

Maxon, though, has never been satisfied with staying Swiss-bound (or earthbound, for that matter). For years, Maxon has aided in space missions — first with the Mars rovers that

have been perusing the Red Planet since the 1970s, then with SpaceX's Dragon spacecraft, which transports cargo to the ISS station.

Maxon's latest extraterrestrial excursion? Helping a space probe land on a 2.7 mile-long comet named 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko that came hurtling from the Kuiper belt at 84,000 mph. If somehow that seems like a pedestrian feat, let's clear something up straightaway: it wasn't.

For ten years, *Rosetta* — a robotic space probe built and launched by the European Space Agency — tailed the comet with steadfast yet futile determination, like an overeager pooch trying to chase down the mail truck. On August 6, 2014 the decade of unbreakable fortitude paid off as the probe finally caught up with "Chury," becoming the first spacecraft to orbit a comet.

That, in itself, was a massive success. But Maxon wasn't done.

Three months later, *Rosetta's* lander, *Philae* — powered by two Maxon DC motors with a diameter of 13 mm each — touched down on the comet's surface. Yes, that was also a first.

And then, ever the overachiever, Maxon went viral.

(Going "viral," by the way, is defined as something "that becomes popular through a viral process of Internet sharing, typically through video sharing websites, social media and email").

The news of the mission's success — landing a manmade vessel on a *comet* isn't exactly something that happens every day — was the talk of the water cooler for 24 hours, slipping insidiously into countless conversations, rooting itself deep into hipster-speak lexicon, and culminating in this:

An unidentified meme wherein the *Rosetta* vessel was inserted brilliantly into that infamous, "break the internet" photo of Kim K from New York-based fashion and pop-culture magazine *Paper* — you know the one (and if

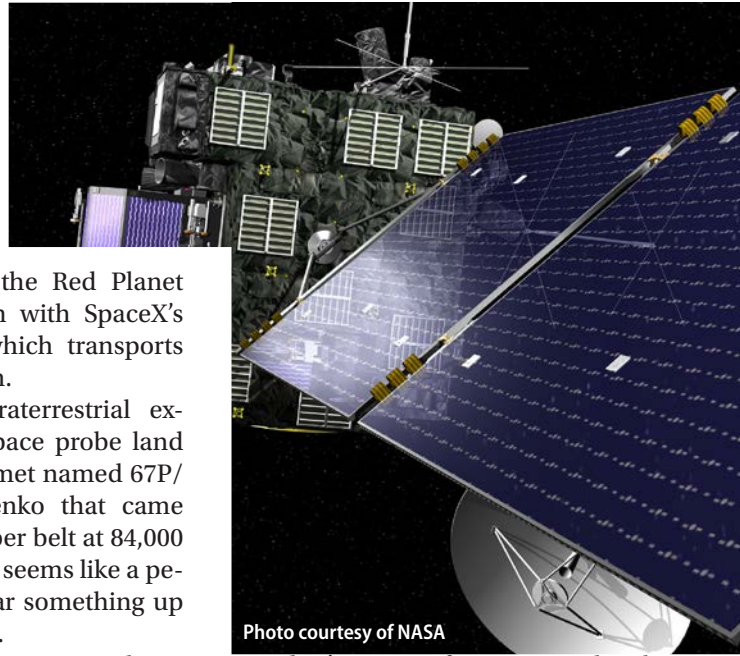


Photo courtesy of NASA

you don't, your wife or son or daughter surely does): lavish pearl necklace coiled around Kardashian's tapered neck, elbow-length black gloves offset on top of coffee-colored skin, an impossibly large, oddly lathered derriere front and center in the world's most unsubtle cry for attention.

It was the picture that spawned a million memes.

Rosetta, and by association, Maxon, happened to be one of them.

Perhaps winding up inches from a faux celebrity's rump isn't everyone's idea of great success. It's true that the real story here lies in the science — being an integral part of a pioneering, historical foray into the far reaches of space is more than enough to garner long-lasting notoriety — but we live in a different world now, one in which visibility on social media often serves as the most important measuring stick.

So let's just say this:

Maxon, a world leader in high-precision drives and systems, continues to push the boundaries of how far motors can go. And that is an obvious and unabashed triumph.

But when the dust clears and the mission concludes at the end of 2015, don't be shocked (fairly or unfairly) when it's remembered more for the whirlwind of internet fanfare, the memes and tweets, and of course, Kim Kardashian's ability to stand in admirably for a giant comet.

And that too is a triumph. **PTE**