How ignition and target gain > 1 was achieved in inertial fusion

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MIPSE

Wednesday, March 8st, 2023

3:30 pm, Ann Arbor Michigan

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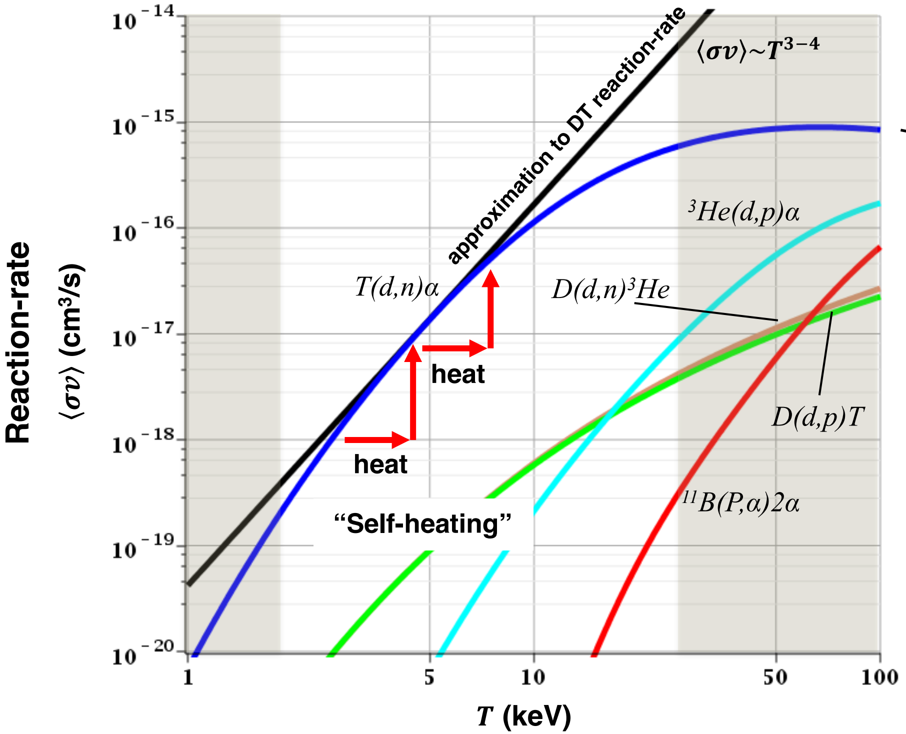
Recent NIF ICF experiments are an "existence proof" of laboratory ignition and "target gain" (G_{target}>1)

- No mystery physics obstacle stands in the way of ignition (explosive thermodynamic instability) or gain (energy out > energy in)
- The theoretical prediction of the physics parameter regime (e.g. Lawson triple product) where ignition was expected is consistent with our results
- Additional laser energy (at fixed power) was very beneficial
- Implosion physics was more sensitive to engineering control of the laser and targets than originally thought
- So far, very high gain (high compression) target designs have not worked as expected. All break-throughs over the past decade have used low gain designs
- Remarkable that we can now talk about burning plasmas, ignition, and scientific breakeven in the past-tense!

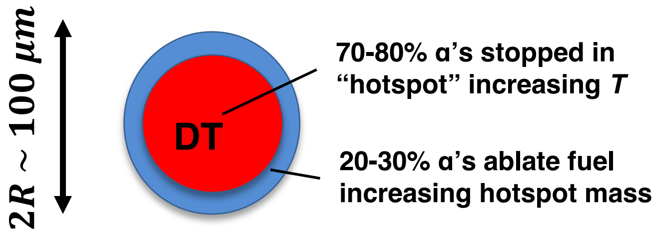
In order to get high fusion yields, we need to assemble the fusion fuel into a configuration that can stop alpha's in the fusion plasma



Fusion reaction:

helium-4 nuclei

$$D + T \rightarrow n\,(14.1\ MeV) + \alpha\,(3.5\ \mathrm{MeV})$$



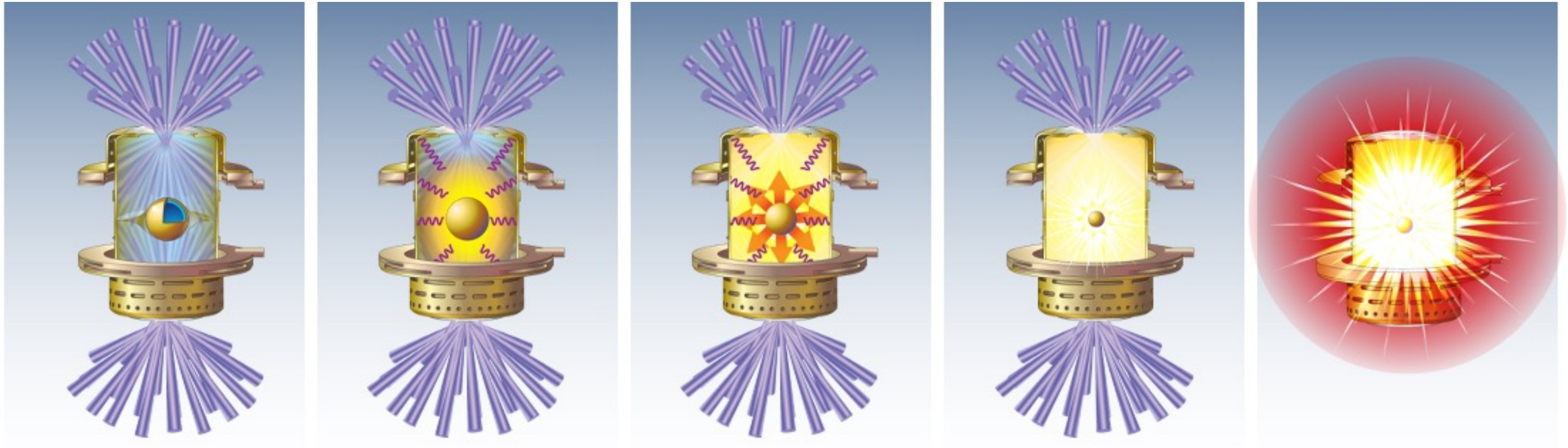
Conditions needed:

- **hotspot areal density ($\rho R > 0.3\ g/cm^2$)**
- **peak central density ($\rho_{DT} > 100\ g/cc$)**
- **pressure ($P_{DT} > 400\ Gbar$)**

If these condition are met, a thermal feed-back loop, "ignition," is generated

Indirect drive inertial confinement fusion (ICF) uses x-rays to ablate and accelerate a capsule of fusion fuel to extreme velocity

Lasers deposit energy into hohlraum	A bath of x-rays is created as the hohlraum heats	The capsule surface ablates at ~150 Mbar	Capsule accelerates inwards doing *pdV* work	Kinetic energy is converted into internal energy



“Implosion” “Stagnation”

Achieving the conditions for ignition demands precise control of design, laser, and target parameters

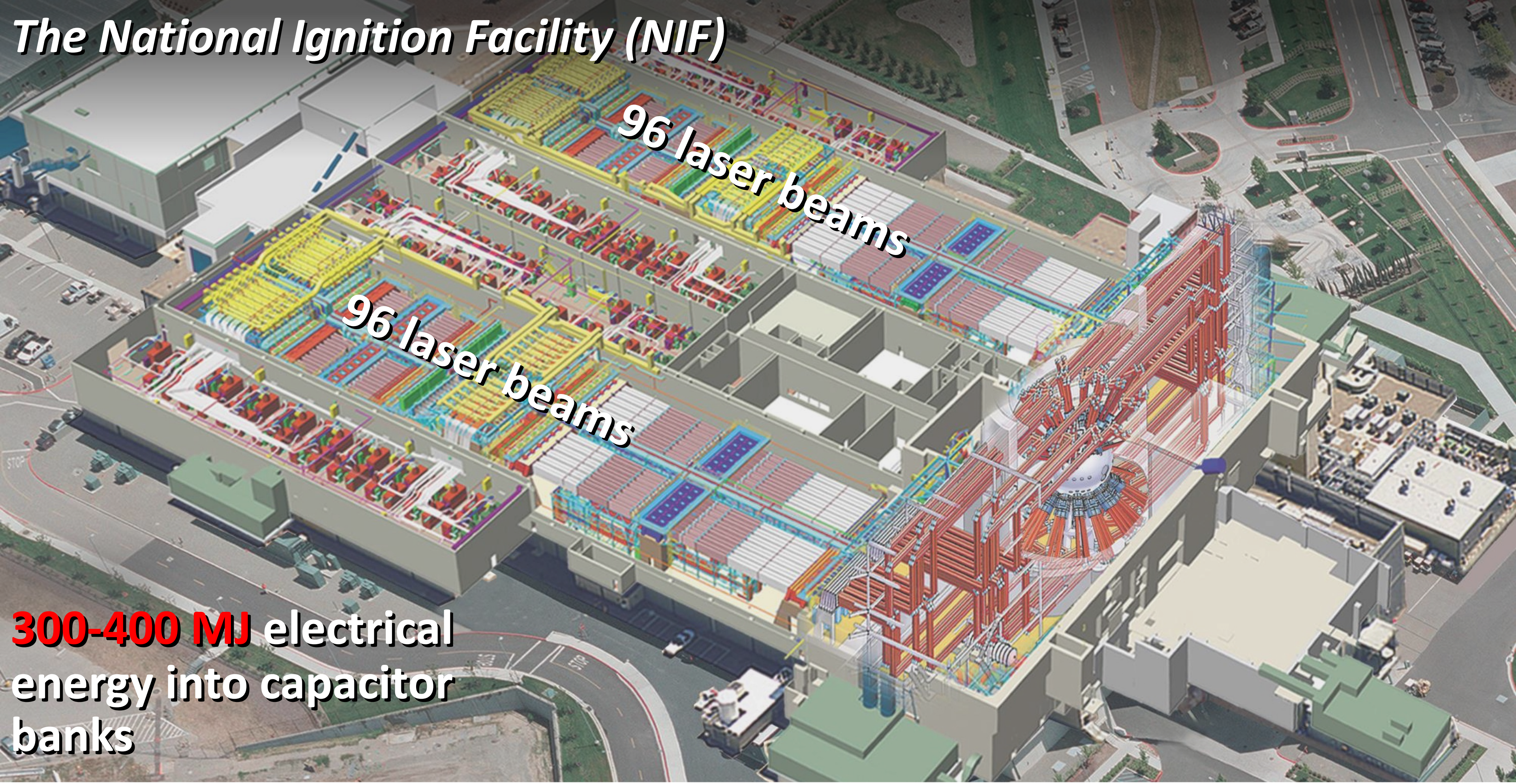
e.g. Nuckolls, et al, Nature, 1972; Lindl, Phys. Plasma, 1995; Haan, et al., PoP, 2011

Often conflated, the terms "burning plasma," "ignition," and "gain" all mean something physically different

- **Burning plasma***
  - ICF: Self-heating energy exceeds external "pdV work" to heat and compress the DT
  - MFE: Self-heating energy exceeds external heating of the DT
- **Ignition (i.e. Lawson Criterion†)**
  - Self-heating power exceeds all DT plasma power losses
    - Losses are radiative, electron heat conduction, negative *pdV* work
  - Results in thermodynamic instability (explosive increase in *T*, *Y*, etc).
- **Target Gain**
  - Fusion yield exceeds laser energy into target
  - 1997 NAS committee used this as "ignition" in a report & the U.S. DOE adopted this definition

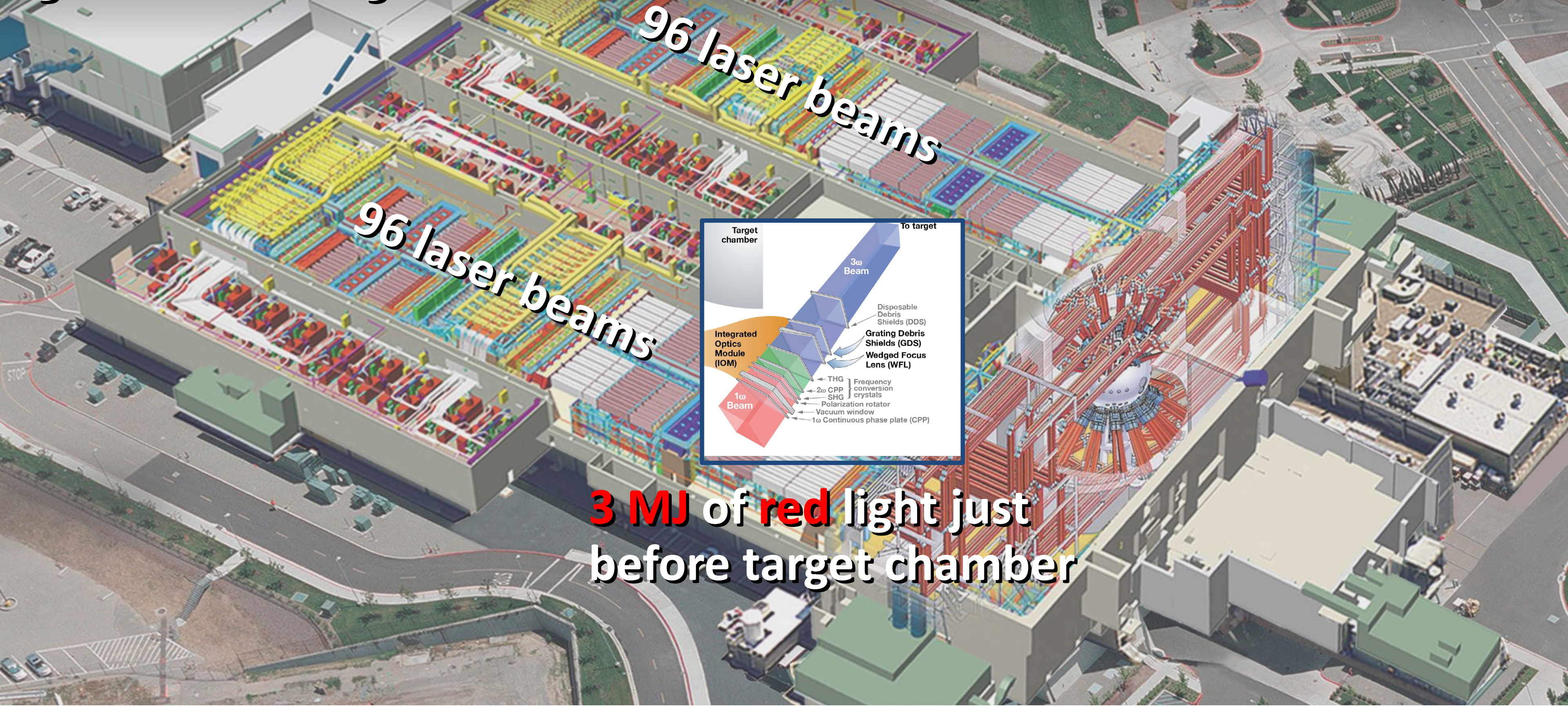
*Betti, et al, PRL, 2015; †Lawson, J.D., Proc. Phys. Soc., B, 1957

The National Ignition Facility (NIF)



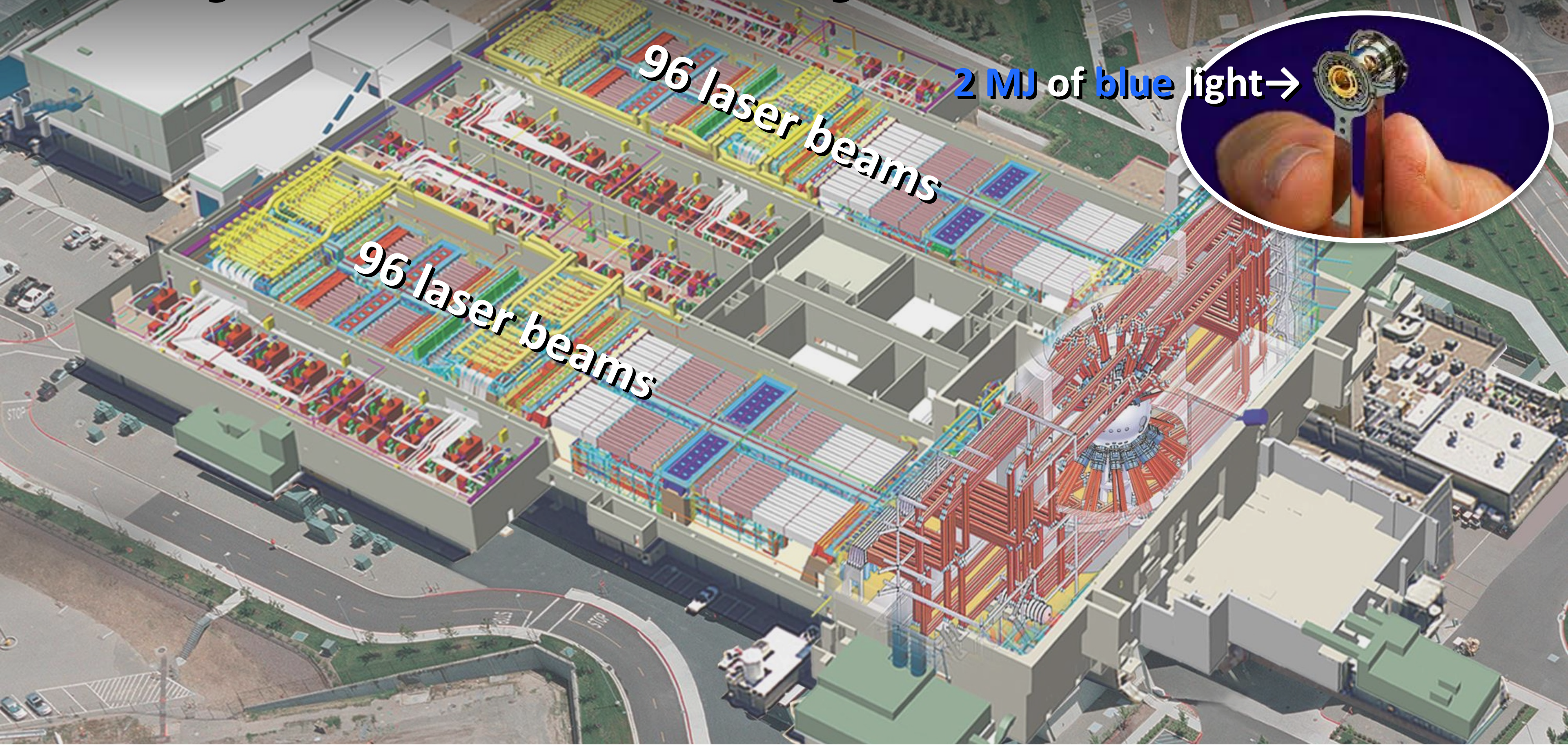
300-400 MJ electrical energy into capacitor banks

The NIF delivers delivers frequency tripled (3ω) laser light into the target chamber

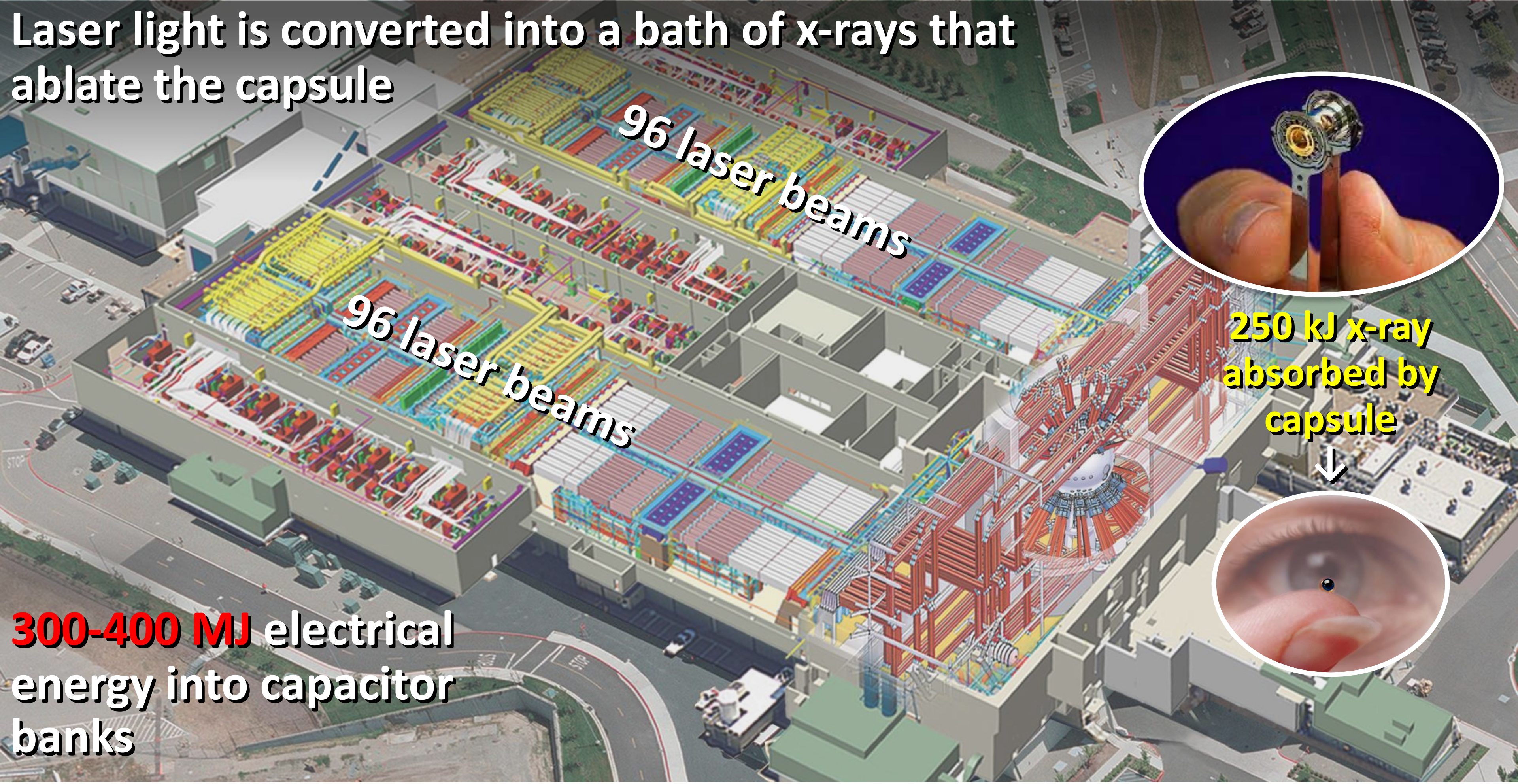


3 MJ of red light just before target chamber

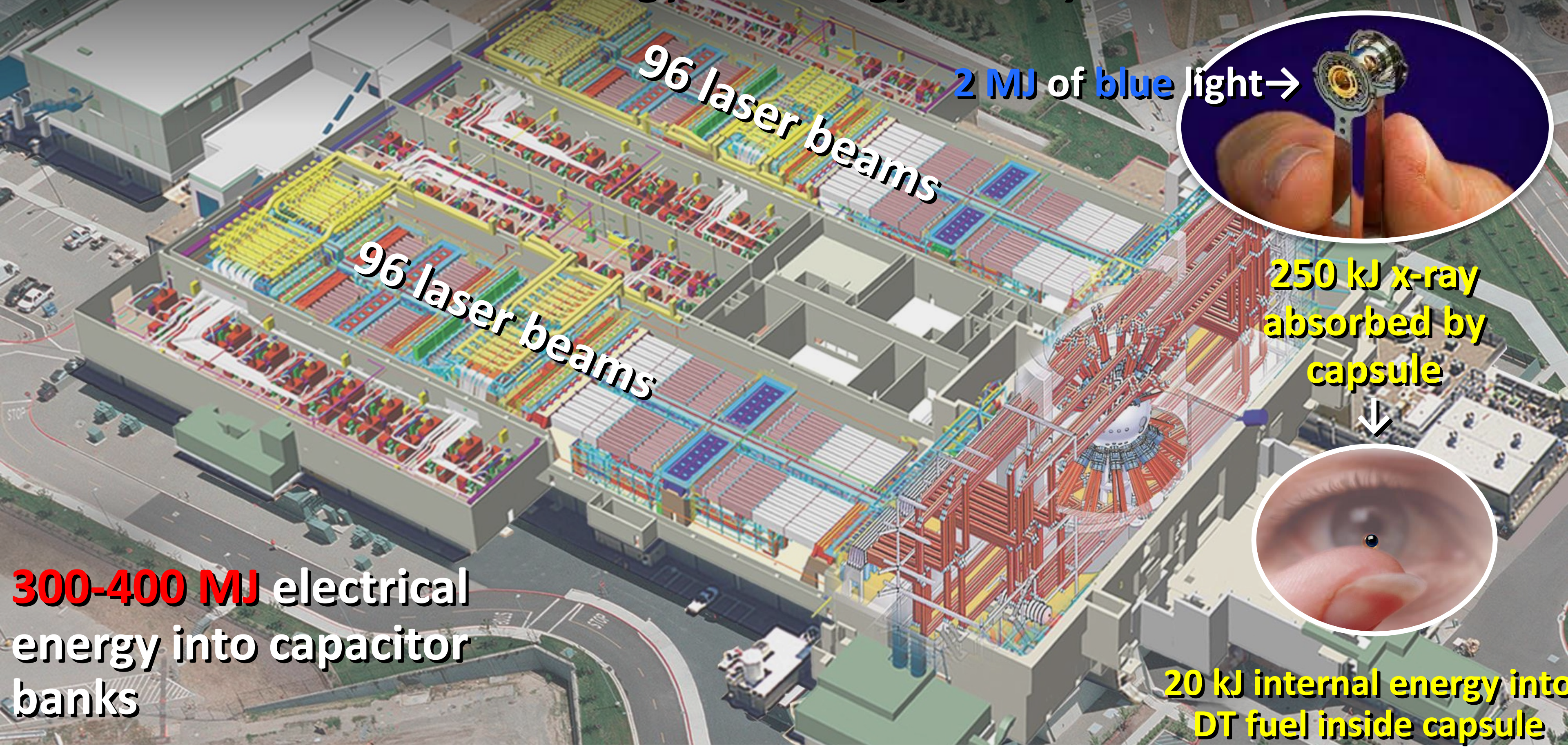
The 3ω light is what enters the ICF target



Laser light is converted into a bath of x-rays that ablate the capsule

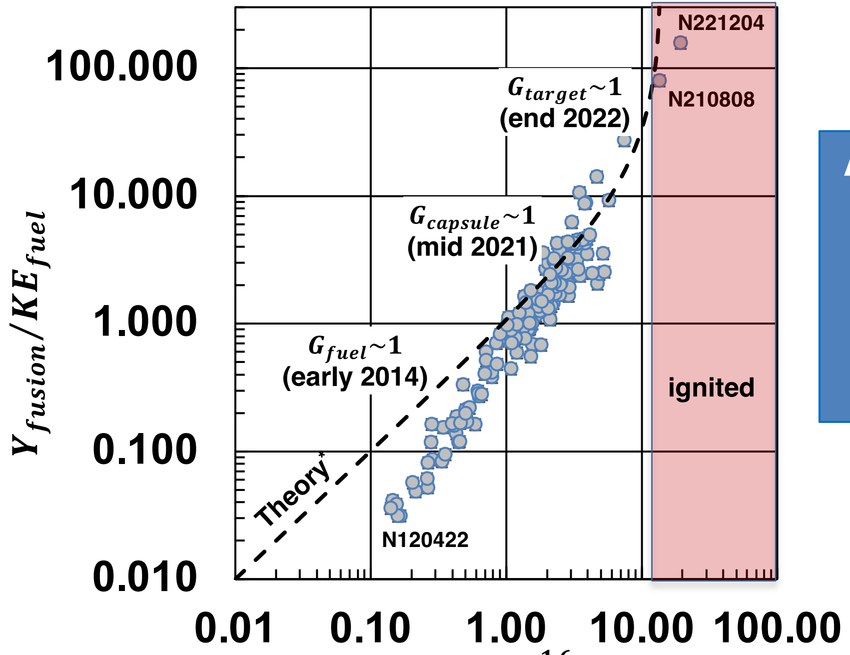


Inertial fusion sacrifices energy for *energy density*



Most of the initial energy is lost before any gets to the fusion fuel

There are several energy gain metrics in ICF, all increased by approximately 5000x over the past decade on the NIF



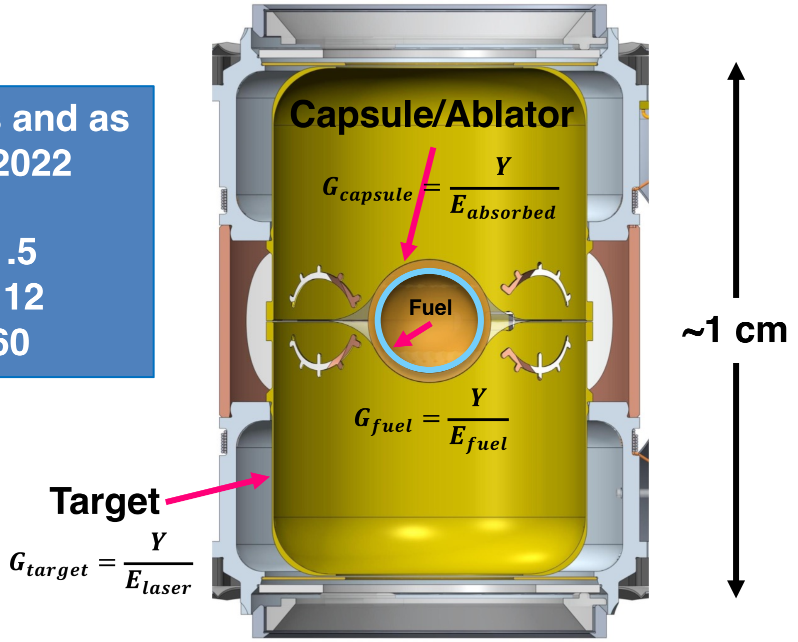
$$0.0195\frac{p\tau T^{1.6}}{1+\frac{E_{fuel}}{E_{hs}}}$$

Generalized Lawson Criterion (GLC) – atm-s & keV units

*Hurricane, et al, RMP in press, 2023

After 10 years and as of Dec. 5, 2022

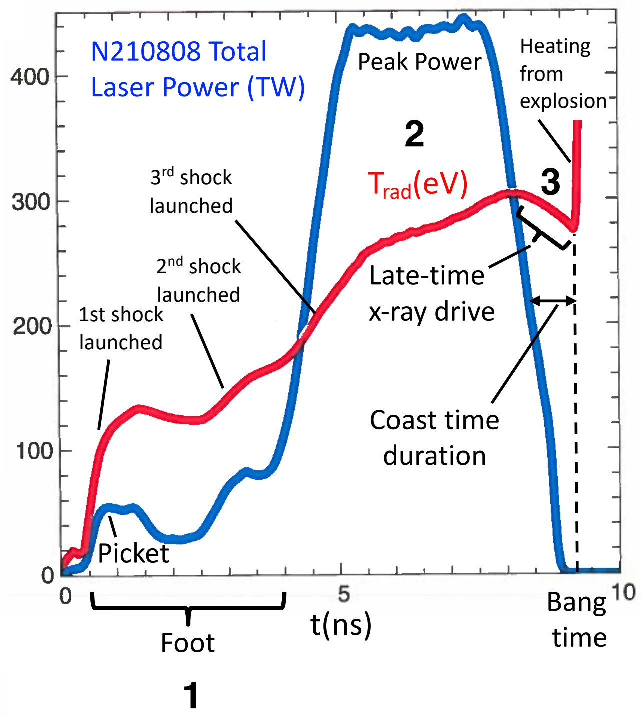
G_{target} ~ 1.5
$G_{capsule}$ ~ 12
G_{fuel} ~ 160



It took a decade of work to tackle several key target physics challenges that frustrated our progress

- **Instability control**
- **Symmetry control**
- **Sufficient energy coupling**
- **Target quality**
- **Ultra-high compression**

In indirect-drive, the hohlraum, ablator, and laser pulse determine the ablation pressure that drives the implosion



Key elements of ICF laser pulse:

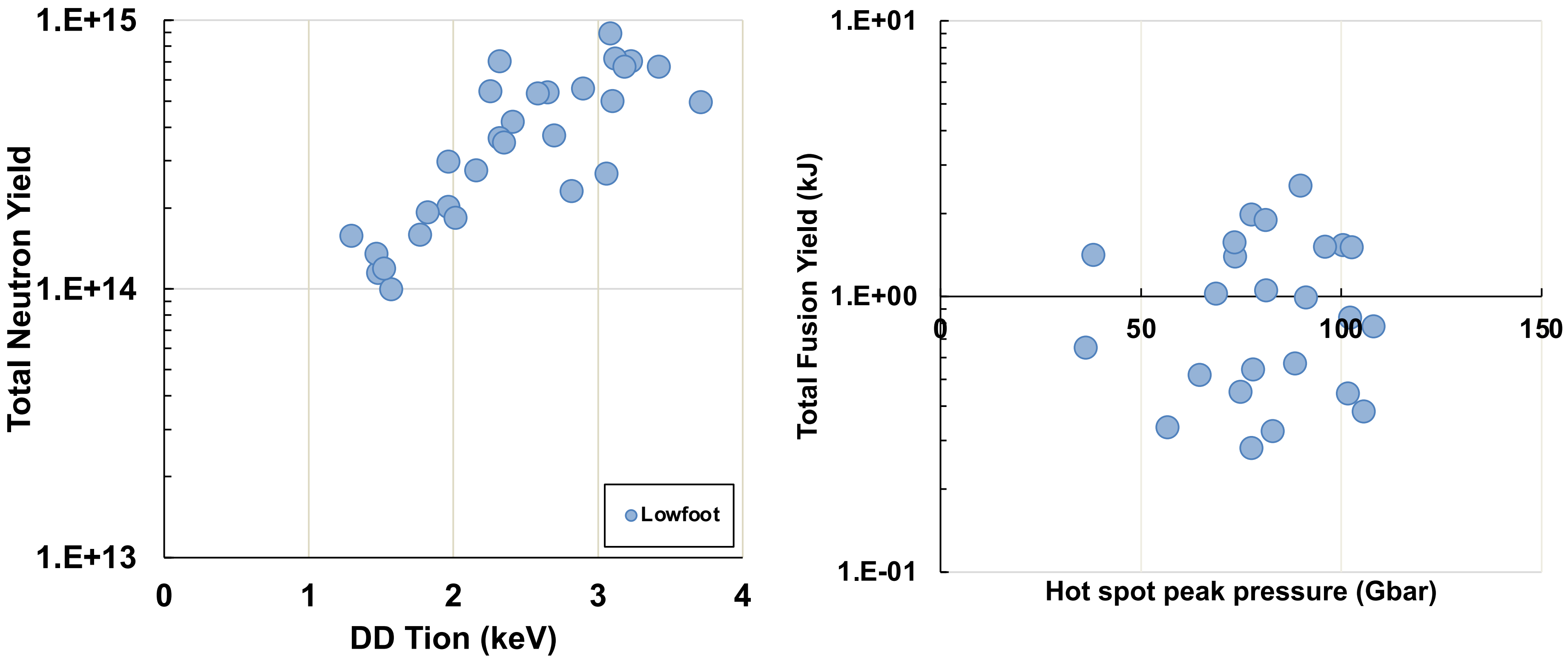
1. Foot – controls stability and majority of fuel entropy (adiabat, α_{if})
2. Peak Power – implosion velocity
3. Coast period – efficiency of KE conversion into DT internal energy, via radius of peak velocity

Hohlraum and laser pulse-shape

Ablation pressure on implosion: $$p_{abl} \sim \left(\frac{\bar{A}}{\bar{Z}+1}\right)^{\frac{1}{2}} T_{rad}^{\frac{7}{2}}(1 - albedo)$$

Ablator material that forms capsule

2010-12: Plastic ablator "Low-foot" implosions were designed to be high yield (> 1 MJ), but underperformed for many reasons*



*Edwards, et al, PoP, 2013; Ma, et al., PoP, 2013; Regan et al, PRL, 2013; Lindl, et al., PoP, 2014; Clark, et al, PoP, 2016

Hydro-dynamic instability defeats density and temperature gradients and is more challenging with higher compression

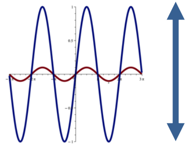
“Takabe” formula for linear growth rate:

“Rayleigh-Taylor” (RT)

$$\gamma_{A-RT} \sim \sqrt{\frac{kg}{1 + kL_\rho}} - kv_{abl}$$

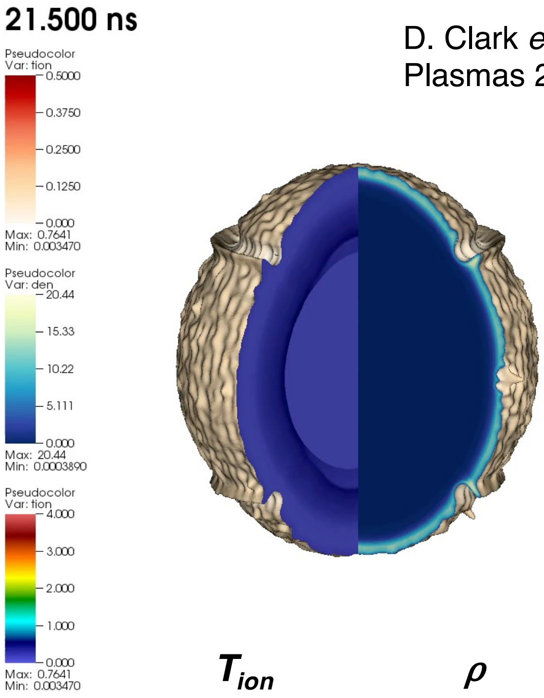
Numerous forms: e.g. Bodner, Betti, Kilkenny, Takabe, etc.

Exponential perturbation growth:



$$\sim e^{\int \gamma_{A-RT} dt}$$

wavelength, $\lambda = \frac{2\pi}{k}$



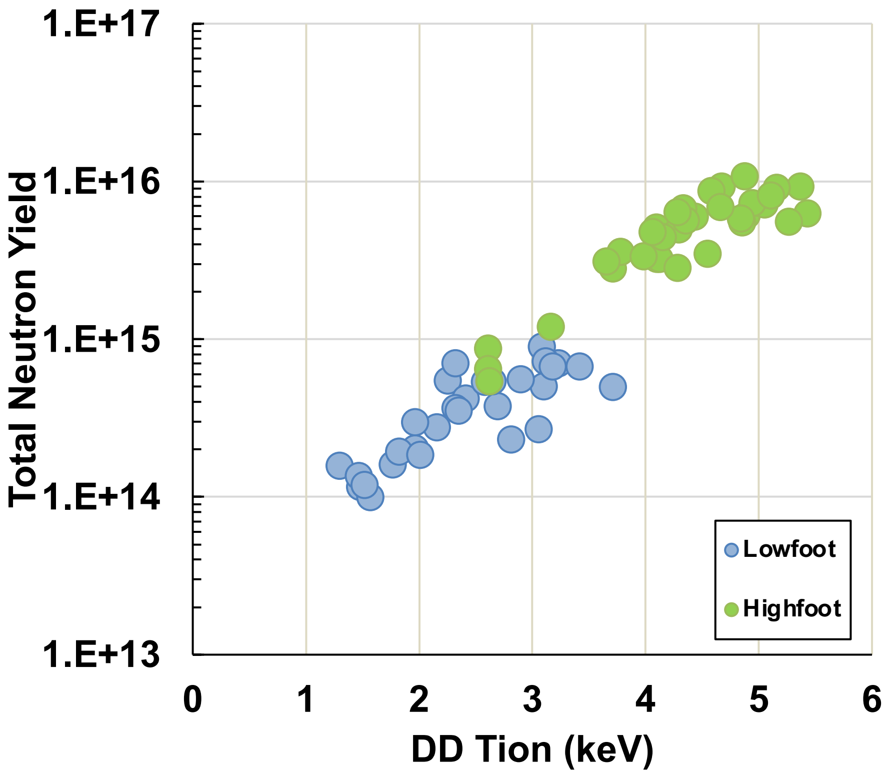
D. Clark *et al.*, Phys. Plasmas 23, 056302 (2016)

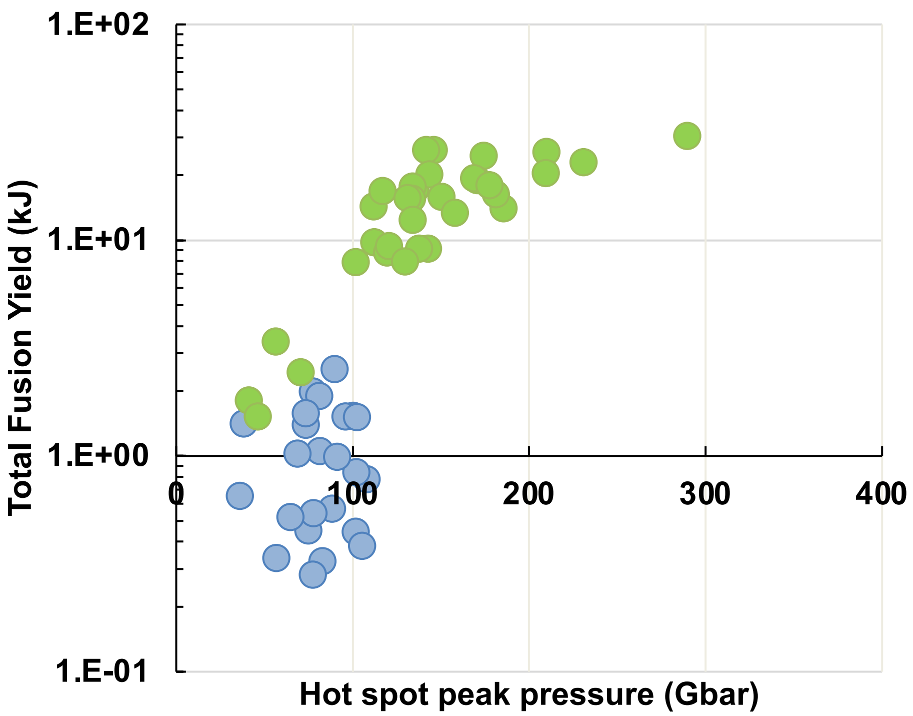
acceleration (g) is destabilizing (but how else to get high v_{imp}?)

long density gradient scale help
high ablation velocity (v_{abl}) helps

Lead to “high foot” implosion

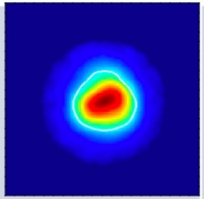
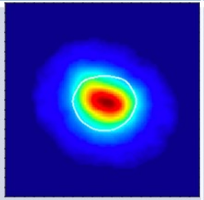
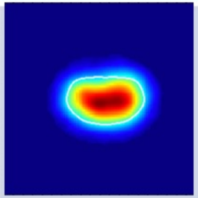
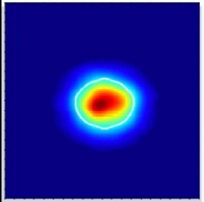
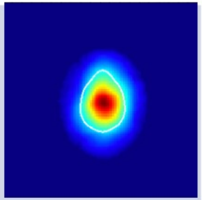
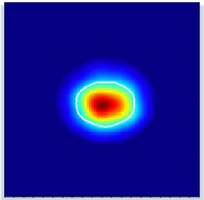
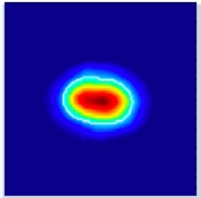
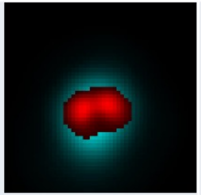
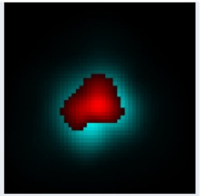
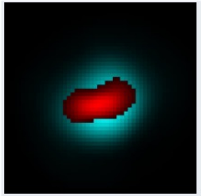
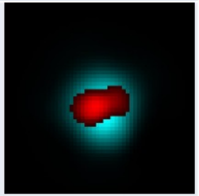
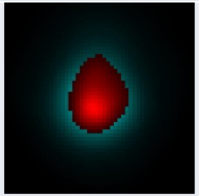
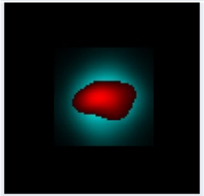
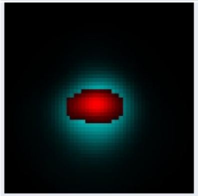
2013-2015: High-foot implosions tested if better controlling hydrodynamic instability would improve performance





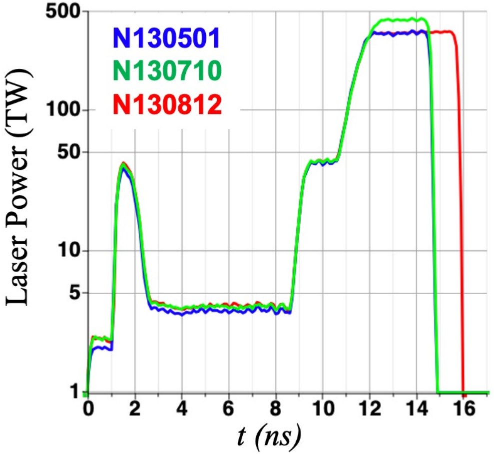
Hinkel, et al. PPCF, 2013; Dittrich, et al. PRL, 2014; Park, et al., PRL, 2014; Hurricane, et al., Nature, 2014

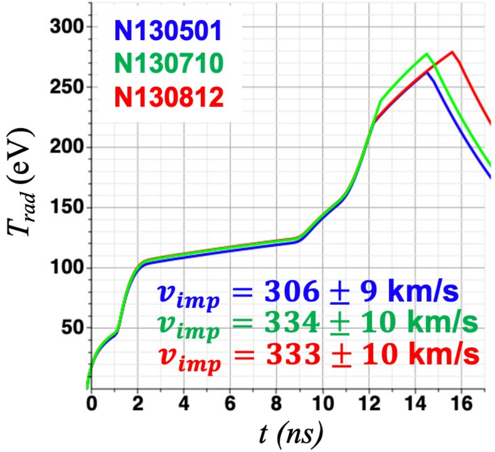
While the high foot implosions increased fusion yield by 10x and had repeatable behavior, symmetry control was an issue

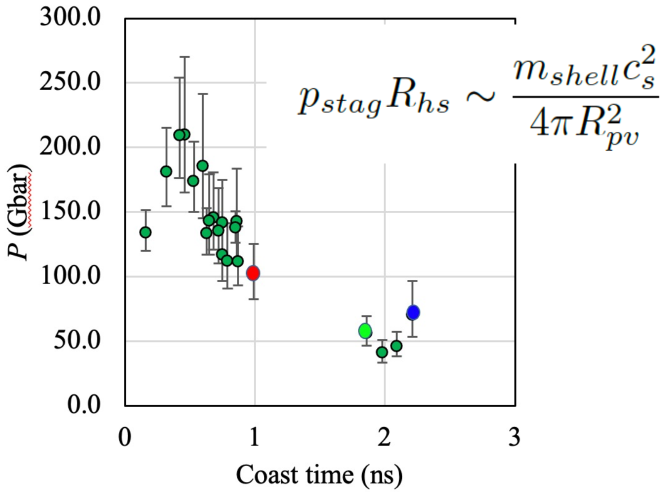
High-foot DT repeatability tests	N131219	N140225 (N131219 repeat)	N141106 (N131219 repeat)	N140520	N141016 (N140520 repeat, bundle misfire)	N150121 (N140520 repeat)	N150409 (N140520 repeat)
	350 TW & 1.6 MJ			390 TW & 1.8 MJ			
X-ray emission at 78-degree view, 100x100 microns							
Neutron emission at 315-degree view (red=13-17 MeV, blue=6-12 MeV)							
Y_{total} (kJ)	9.83	9.14	9.11	25.4	10.0	20.4	22.9
T_{DT}(keV)	4.91±0.15	4.51±0.15	4.44±0.13	5.54±0.15	4.07±0.13	5.21±0.11	5.5±0.15

Spears, et al., PoP, 2014; Ma, et al, PRL, 2016; Hurricane, et al, Nat. Phys, 2016

Series of high-foot experiments revealed the importance of "coast-time" in maximizing mechanical power transfer





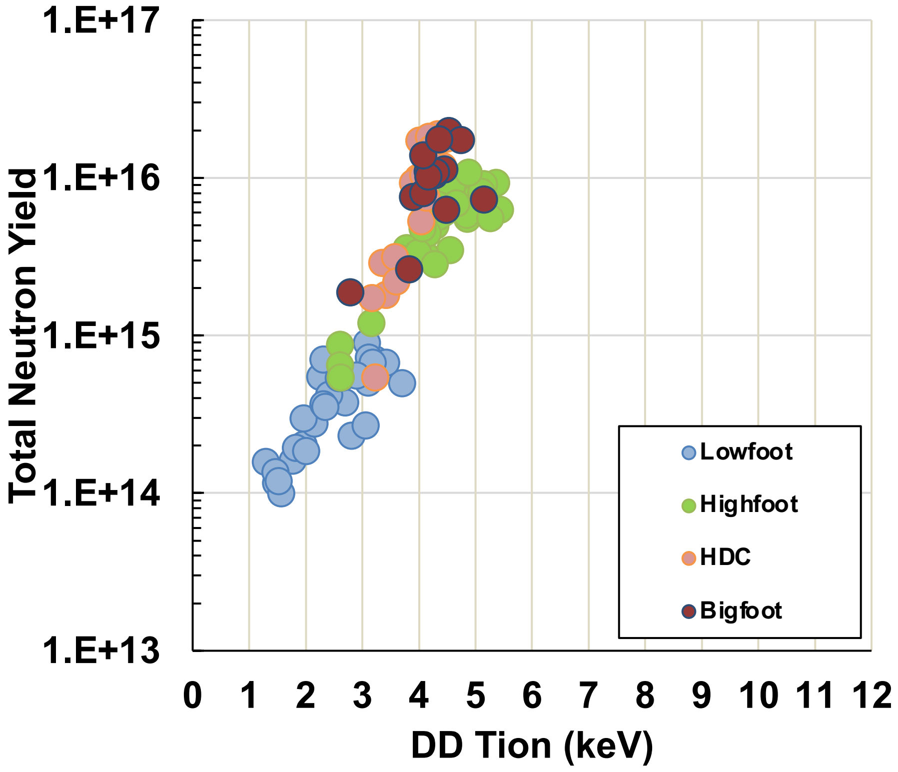


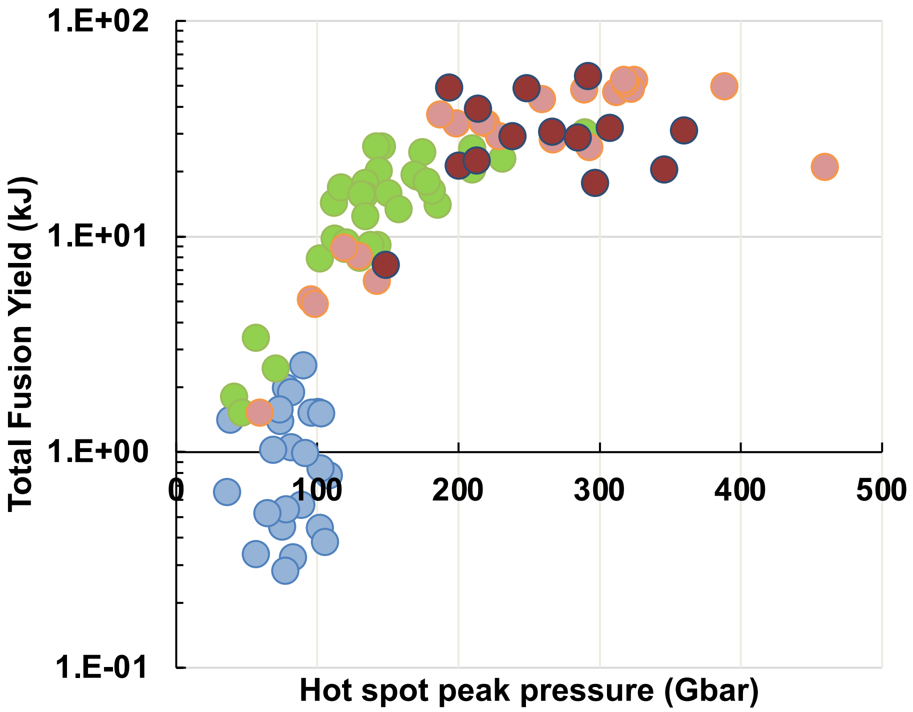
Coast-time ~ duration between max compression and end of laser pulse

"Late braking"

Radius of peak velocity, R_{pv}, minimized with short coast-time

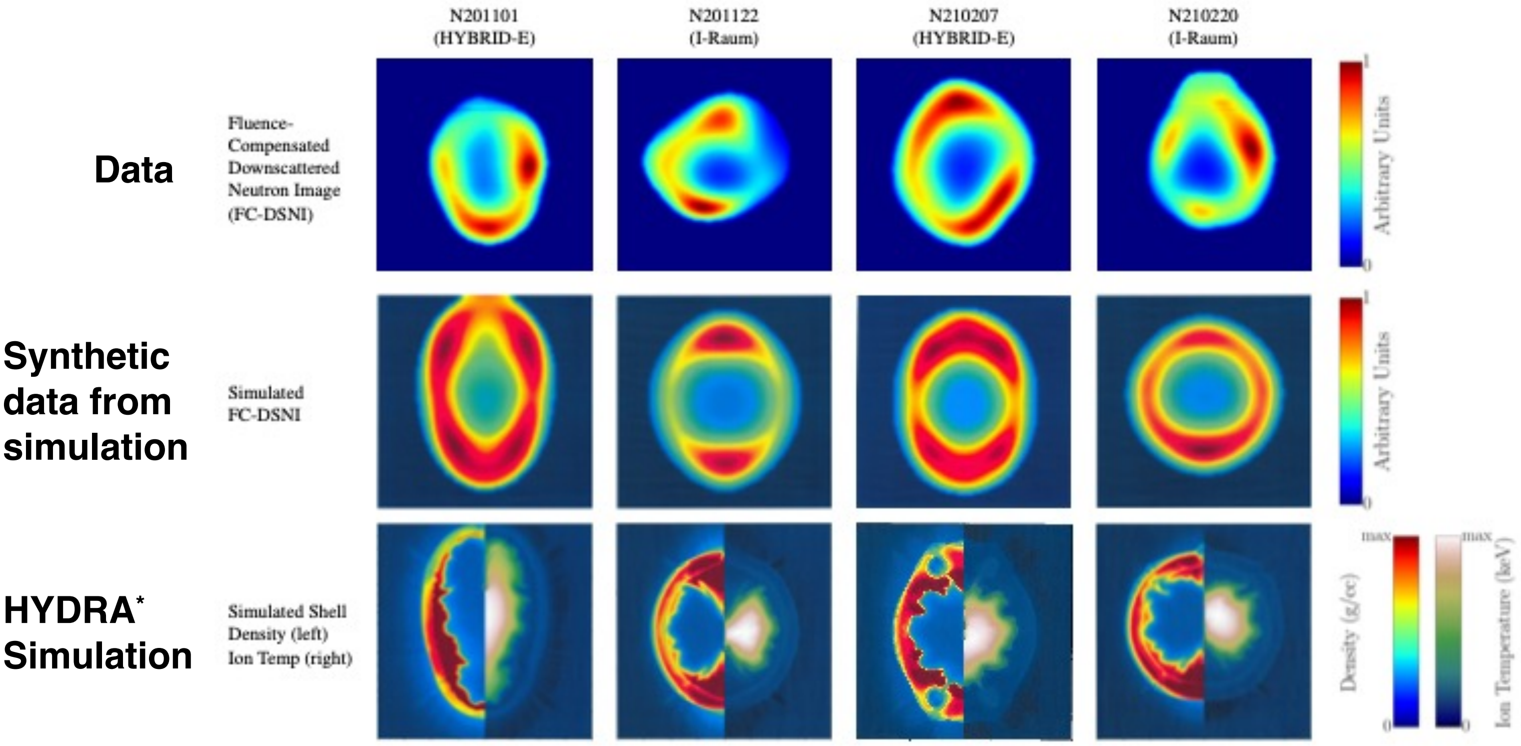
2015-2018: Higher pressures achieved using high density carbon ablators and low gas-fill hohlraums





Divol, et al, PoP, 2017; LePape, et al, PRL, 2018; Berzak-Hopkins, et al, PPCF, 2018; Casey, et al, PoP, 2018; Baker, et al, PRL, 2018; Thomas, et al., PoP, 2020

Symmetry control was improved with HDC ablators and low gas-fill hohlraums, but control is still challenging, even today

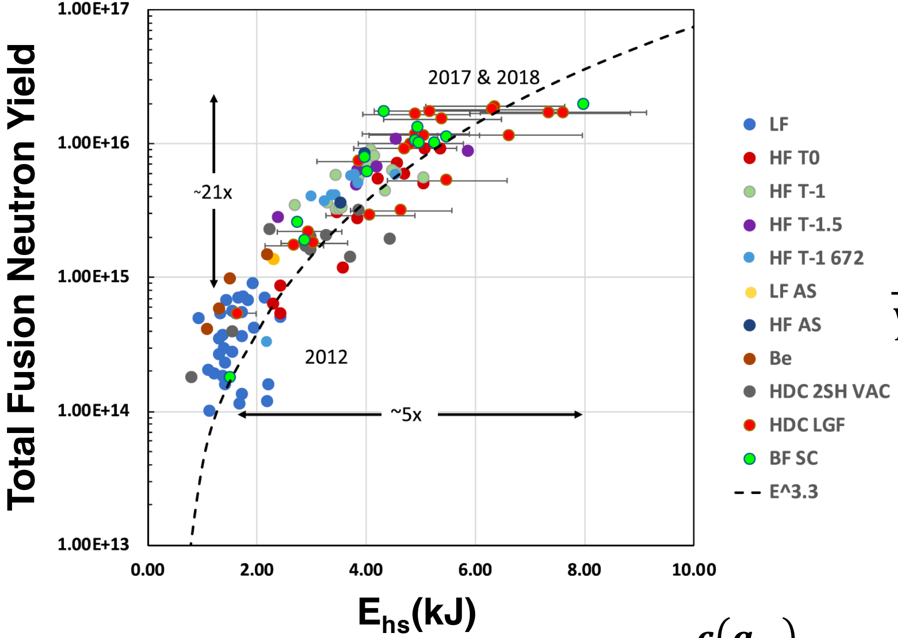


e.g. Kritcher, et al., Nature Phys. 18, 251 (2022)

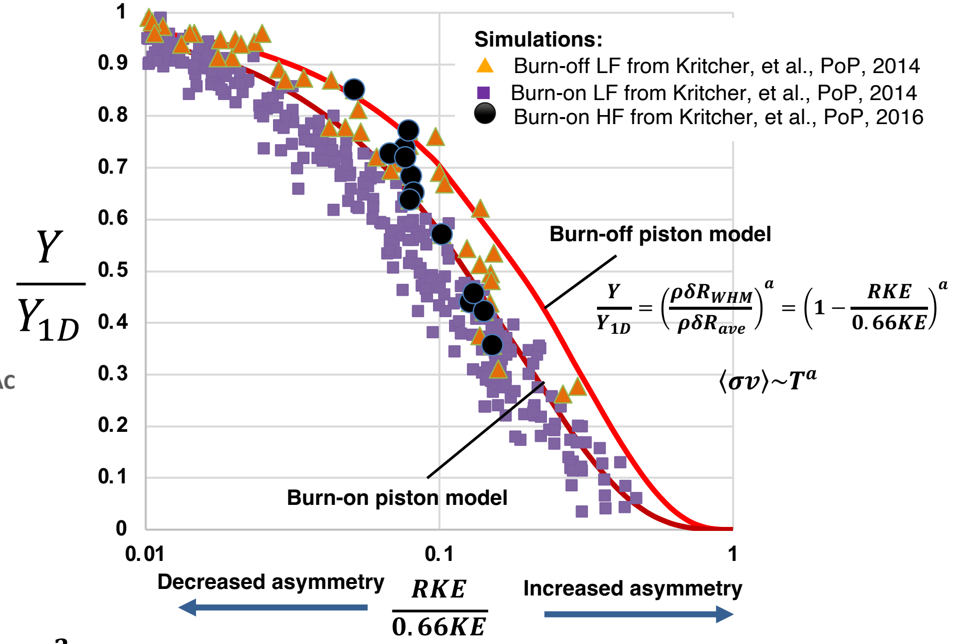
*Marinak, et al., PoP, 2003

In ICF, it is essential to maximize the conversion of implosion kinetic energy into hotspot internal energy

Experimental scaling of fusion yield with hotspot energy, Y ~ $E^{3.3}$



Degradation of fusion yield with asymmetry, Y ~ $(1\text{-nRKE})^{3.3}$



E_{hs}, KE, & symmetry connected: $E_{hs} = \frac{c(a_{if})}{2} m_{shell} v_{imp}^2 (1 - nRKE)$

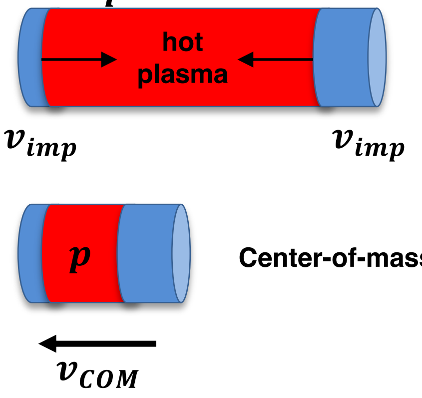
KE split into hotspot, $c(\alpha_{if}) \sim 0.66$

Implosion symmetry control is important, because it wastes kinetic energy, that could have heated the fusion fuel

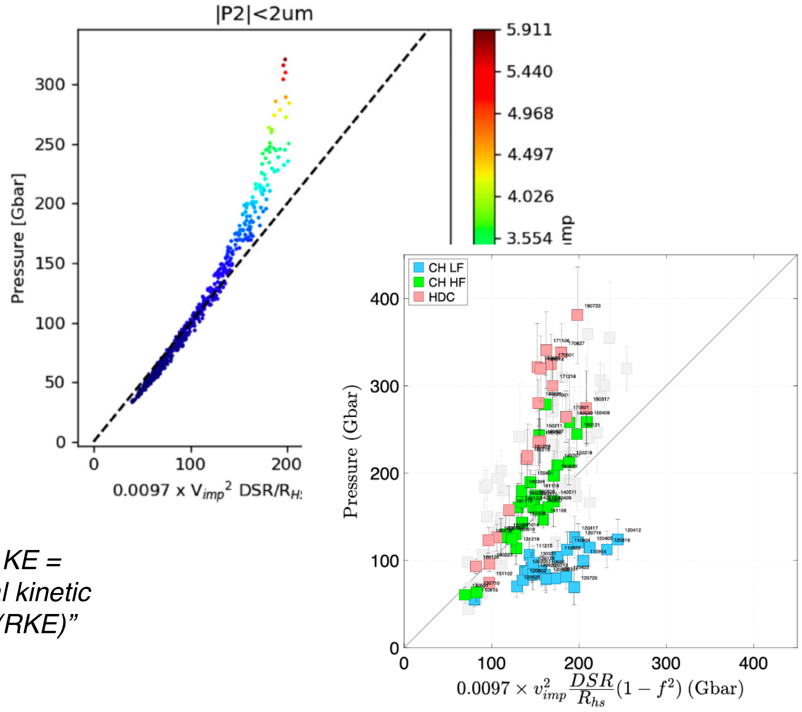
Asymmetric implosion abstracted to pistons

$pV^{\gamma} \sim const$

Mode-1:



Center-of-mass motion



From conservation of energy and momentum:

$$p = \frac{1}{3}\frac{m_{pistons}v_{imp}^2}{V}\left(1 - \frac{v_{com}^2}{v_{imp}^2}\right)$$

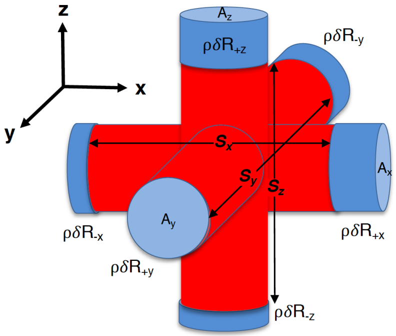
minimum hot volume

"wasted" KE

Wasted KE = "residual kinetic energy (RKE)"

Asymmetry wastes kinetic energy, even when there is no net center of mass motion – geometry is a reflection of energy

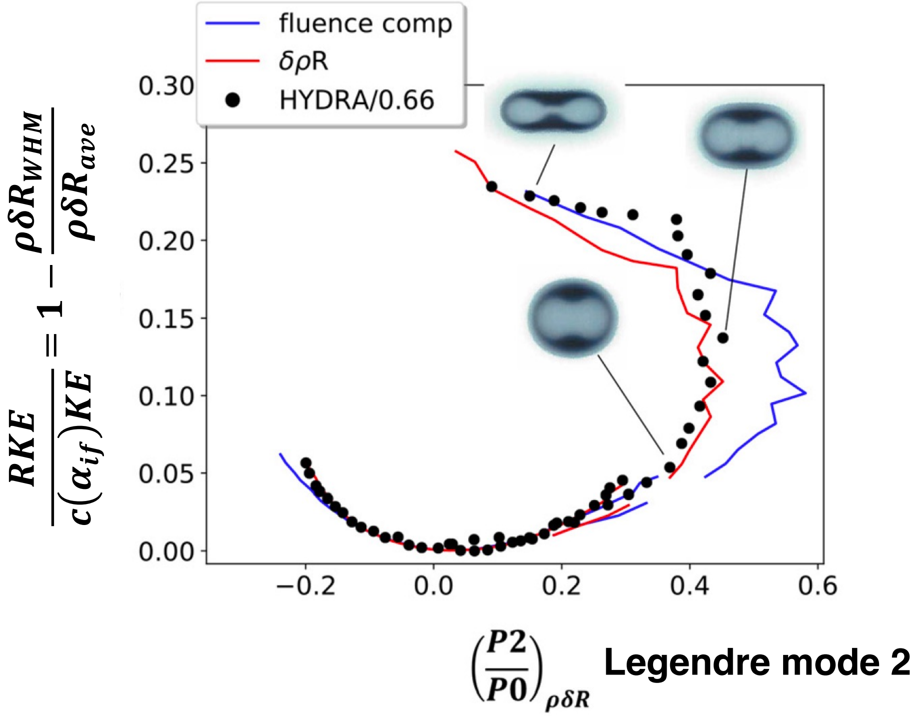
Mode-2:



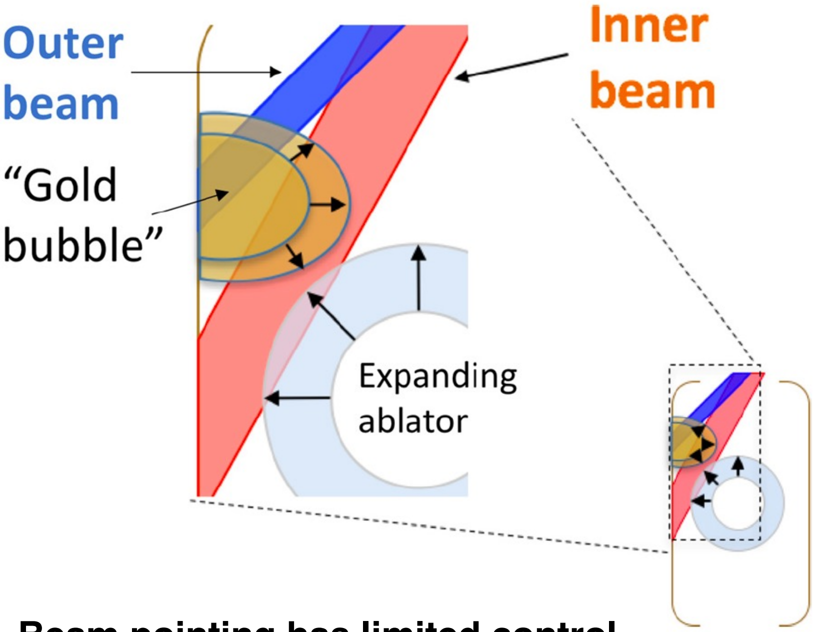
Key parameter for 3D asymmetry:

$$\frac{\rho\delta R_{WHM}}{\rho\delta R_{ave}} = \frac{\left(\int dA\right)^2}{\left(\int \frac{dA}{\rho\delta R}\right)\left(\int \rho\delta R dA\right)}$$

WHM = weighted harmonic mean* of shell areal density

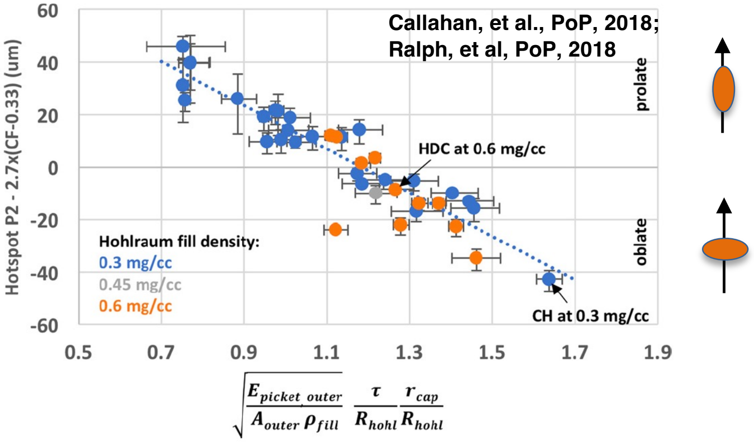


Significantly improved understanding of the levers controlling implosion symmetry obtained during the 2015-2018 period



Beam pointing has limited control

Legendre mode-2 ("P2") scaling:

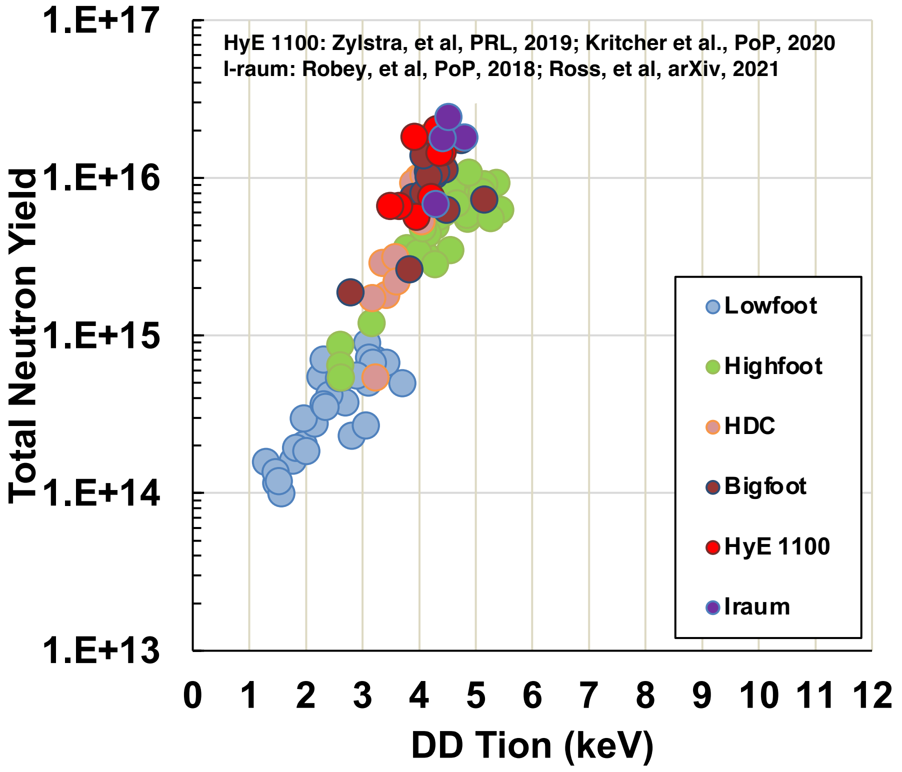


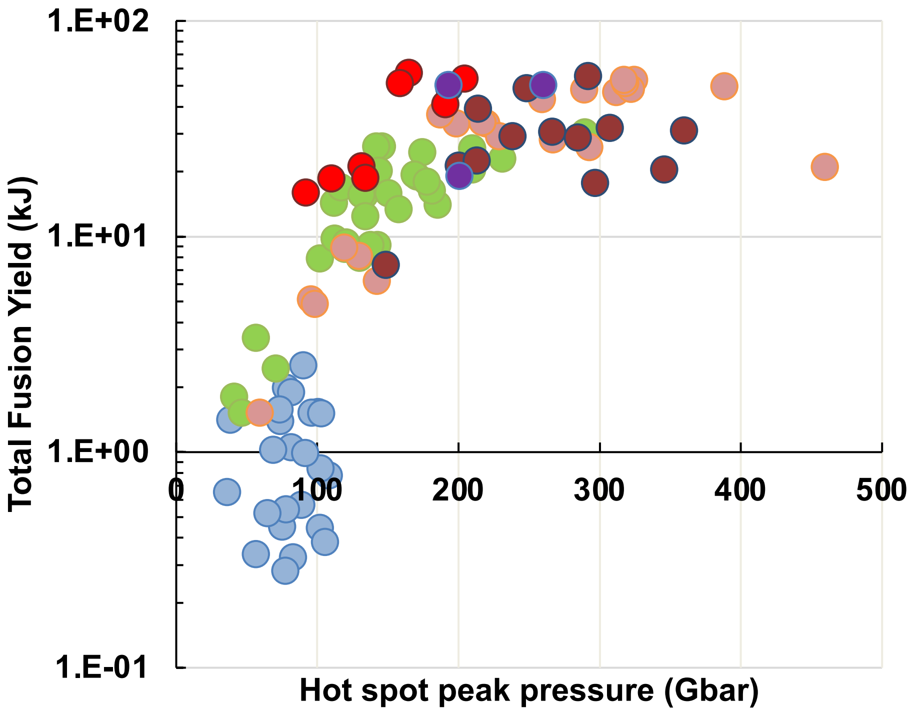
Cross-beam energy transfer with low gas-fill:

$\Delta\lambda = 0\text{Å}$ $\Delta\lambda = 1\text{Å}$

A. L. Kritcher, et al *Phys. Rev. E* 98, 053206 (2018); L. Pickworth, et al, PoP (2020)

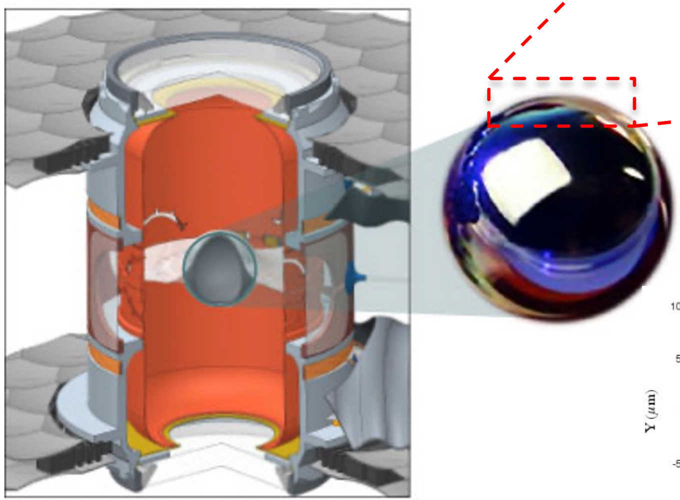
2018-2020: With a better understanding of the levers on capsule and hohlraum control, we scaled up capsule radius, but ...

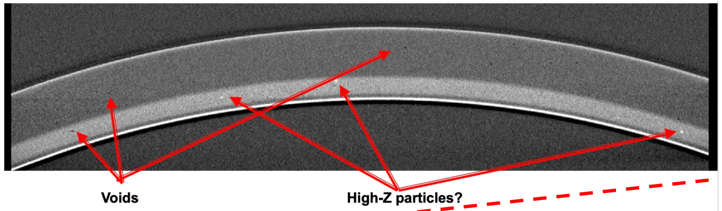


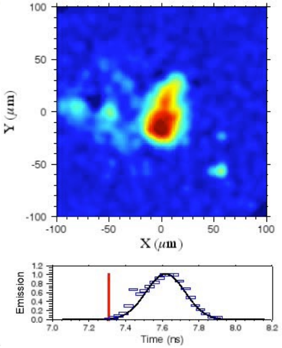


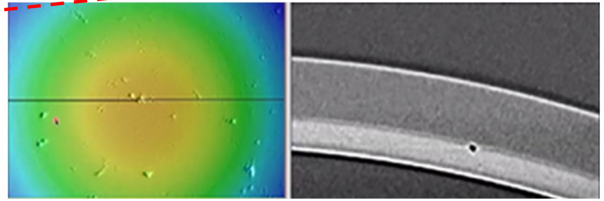
... initially this strategy struggled

We got surprised by numerous capsule defects when we increased capsule radius … problems identified (as shown) and eventually resolved

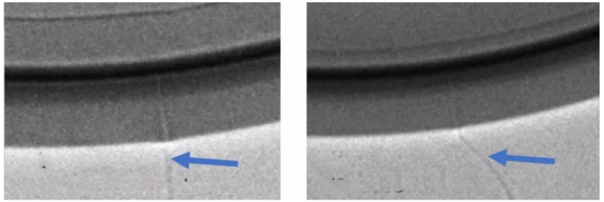








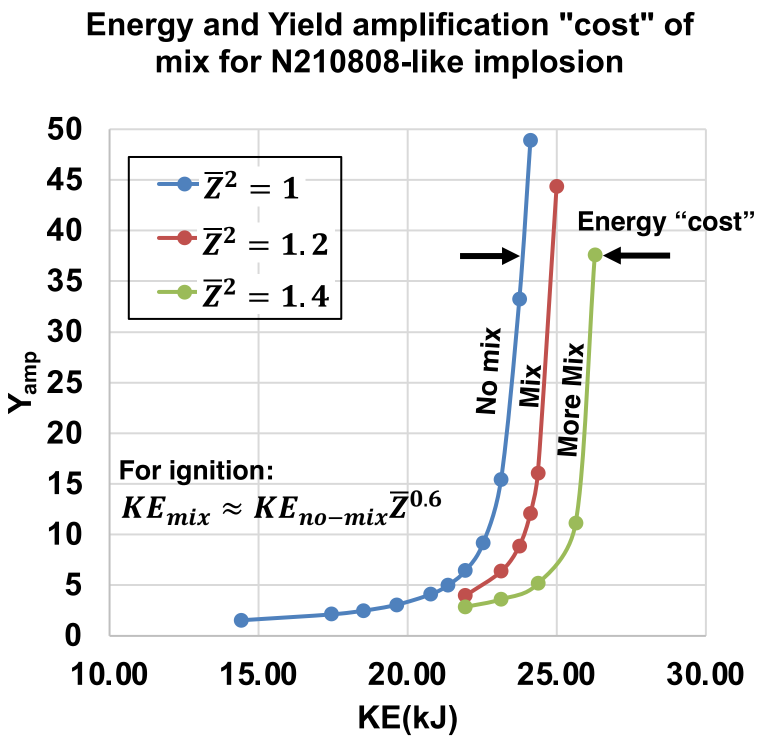
(Left) Confocal microscope image showing pits on the capsule surface. (Right) Tomographic image showing an internal void.

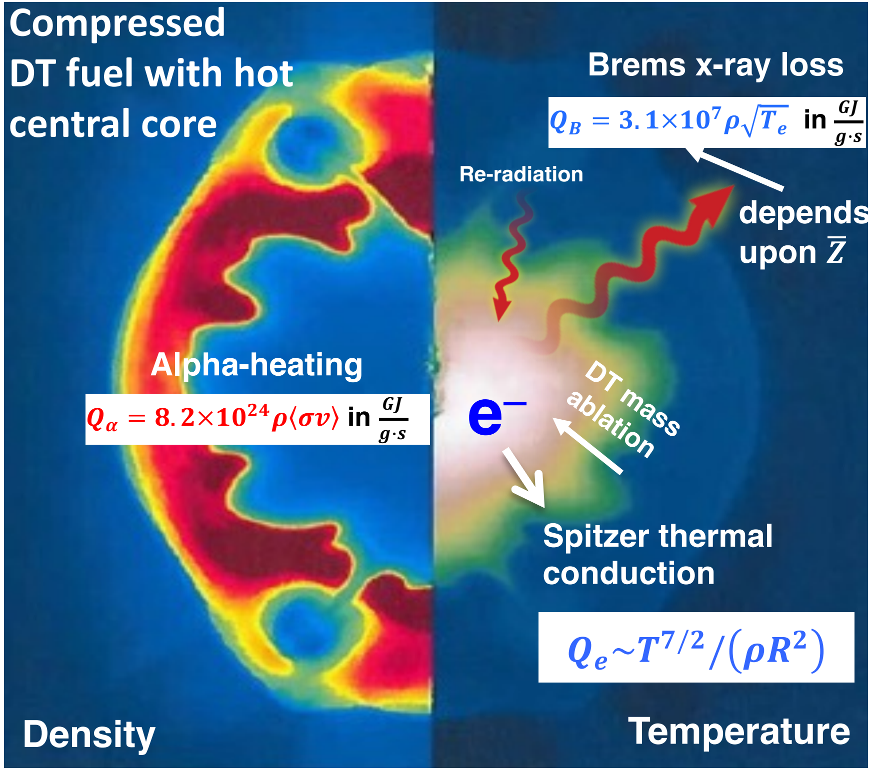


(Left) The five-micron fill tube used in the Feb. 7, 2021, experiment (an average human hair is about 70 microns in diameter). (Right) The two-micron tube used on Aug. 8. The thinner tubes are challenging to fabricate and extremely fragile, as shown by the bend that develops as the capsule cools.

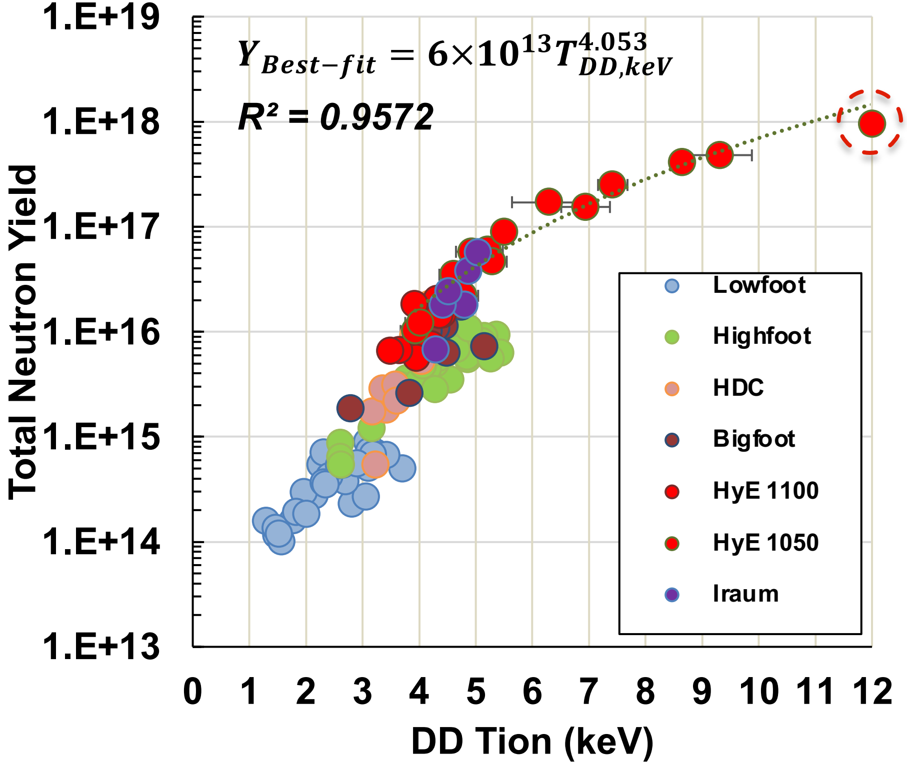
Slide courtesy T. Braun, LLNL target fabrication

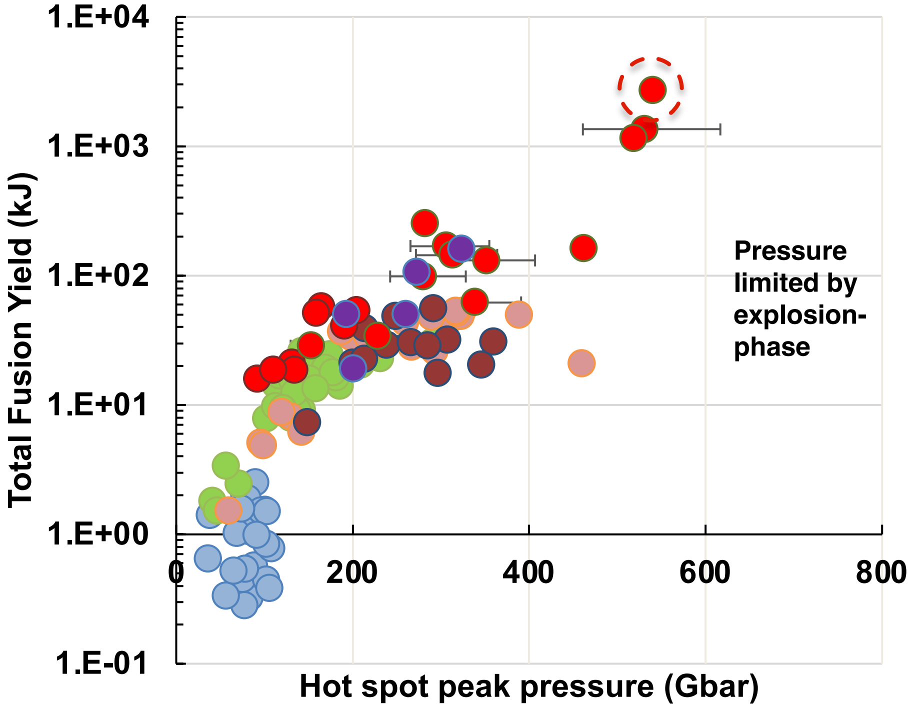
Like asymmetry, more mixing (from capsule defects + hydro) costs energy, putting more demands upon the driver





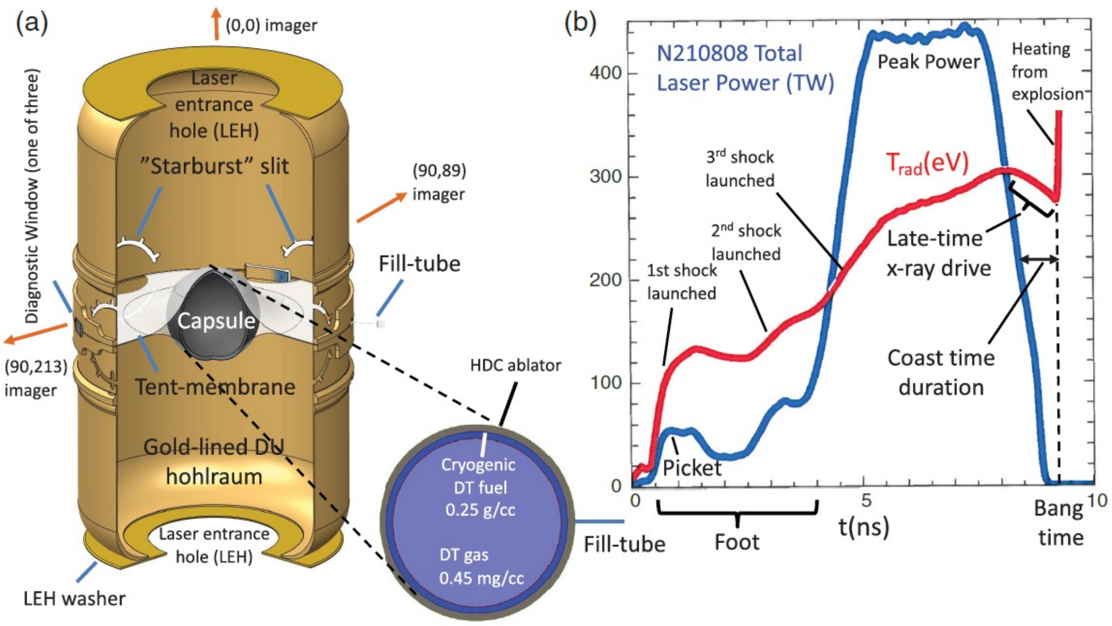
After years of effort, we got more energy from the NIF laser (1.9 MJ → 2.05 MJ) and had reasonable capsule quality, enabling the most recent success





By addressing problems *in steps* and using a basic principles understanding, coupled with design optimization and finesse, went from 1.5 kJ to 3.15 MJ fusion yield

HYBRID-E is the first ICF design to obtain a burning plasma[1] and ignition[2] in the laboratory



Key elements:

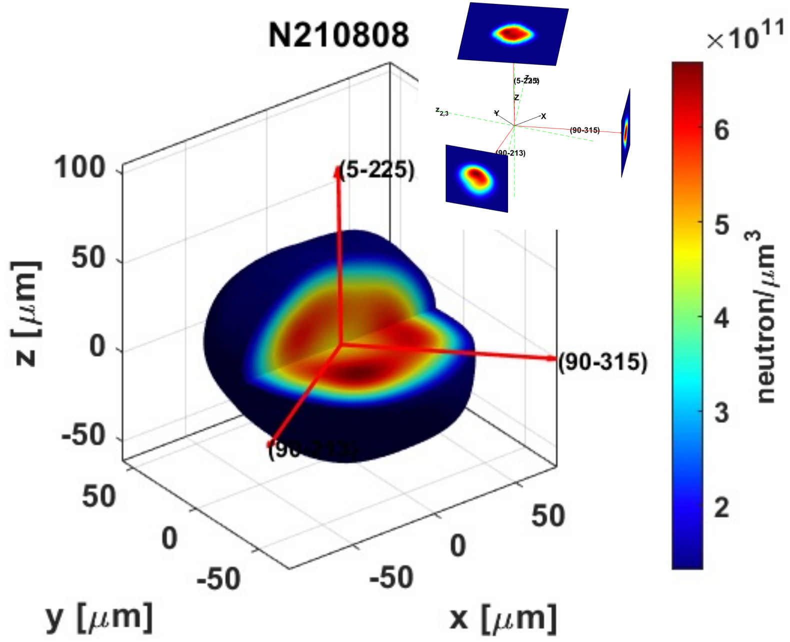
- Up to 20% larger radius capsule than previous HDC ablator designs
- Reduced LEH size, for better x-ray confinement[3], with symmetry control via CBET[4]/pointing
- Lower laser peak power, but an extended duration of peak power in order to reduce "coast time" duration[5]
- All resulting in increased hotspot energy and pressure

[2]Abu-Shawareb, et al (Indirect Drive ICF Collaboration), PRL, 2021; Kritcher, et al, PRE, 2021; Zylstra, et al, PRE, 2021

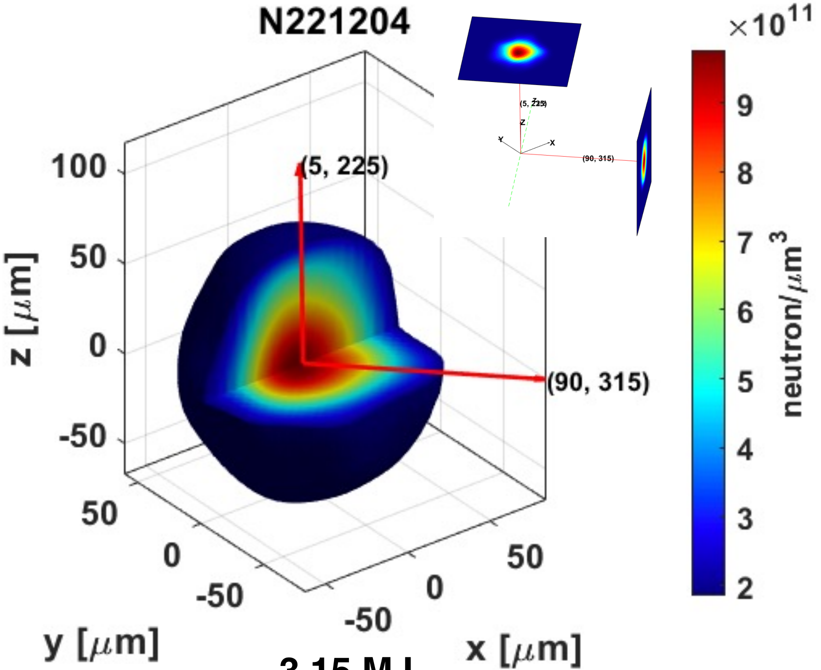
[1]Zylstra, et al., Nature, (2022); Kritcher, et al., Nature Phys. (2022); [3]Ralph, et al. "Hohlraum Scans Project," APS-DPP (2021); [4]Kritcher, et al., PRE (2018); [5]Hurricane, et al. PoP, (2017)

8% thicker ablator (m_{shell}), with +8% more laser energy, and improved symmetry pushed the 1.37 MJ result to 3.15 MJ

Time integrated neutron imaging



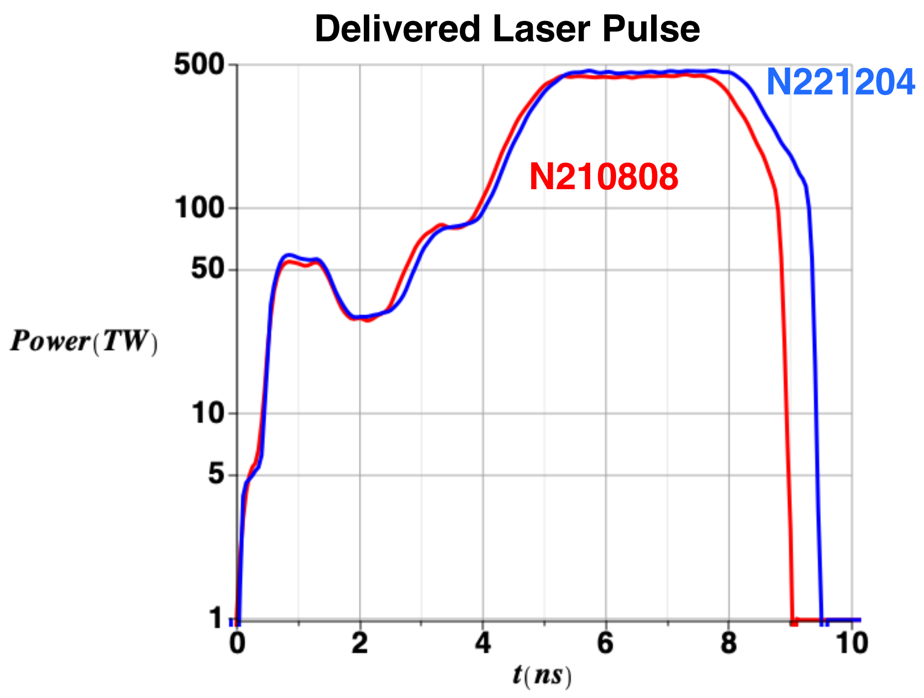
1.37 MJ

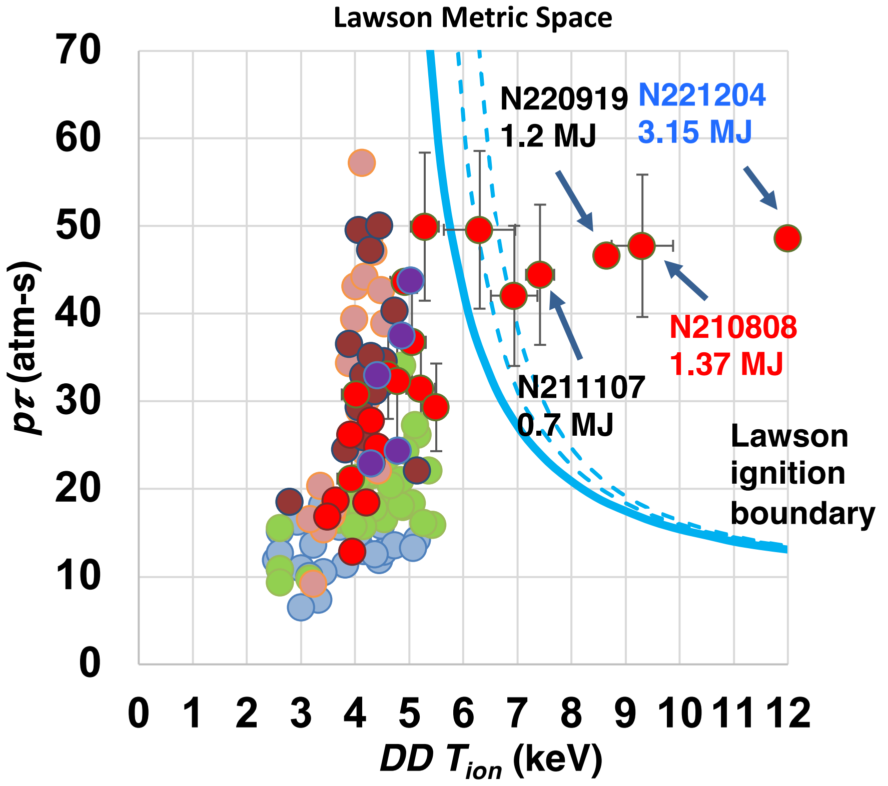


3.15 MJ

Neutron Imaging System; Vologev, et al., RSI, (2014)

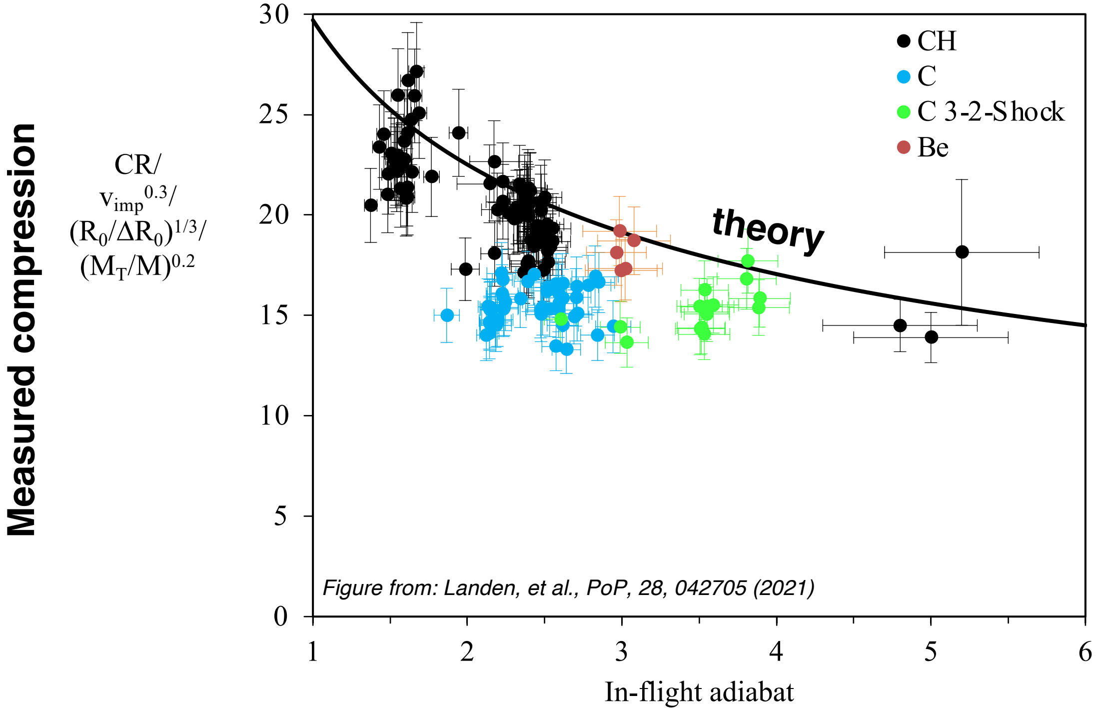
Increasing laser energy and capsule thickness by +8%,while maintaining symmetry control, obtained G_{target} > 1 Dec. 5, 2022





Story of success by "incremental" evolutionary improvements

Outstanding problem: materials appear stiffer than models expected and higher compression is needed for increased burn efficiency



Expected compressibility based on entropy

Fraction of DT fuel burned:

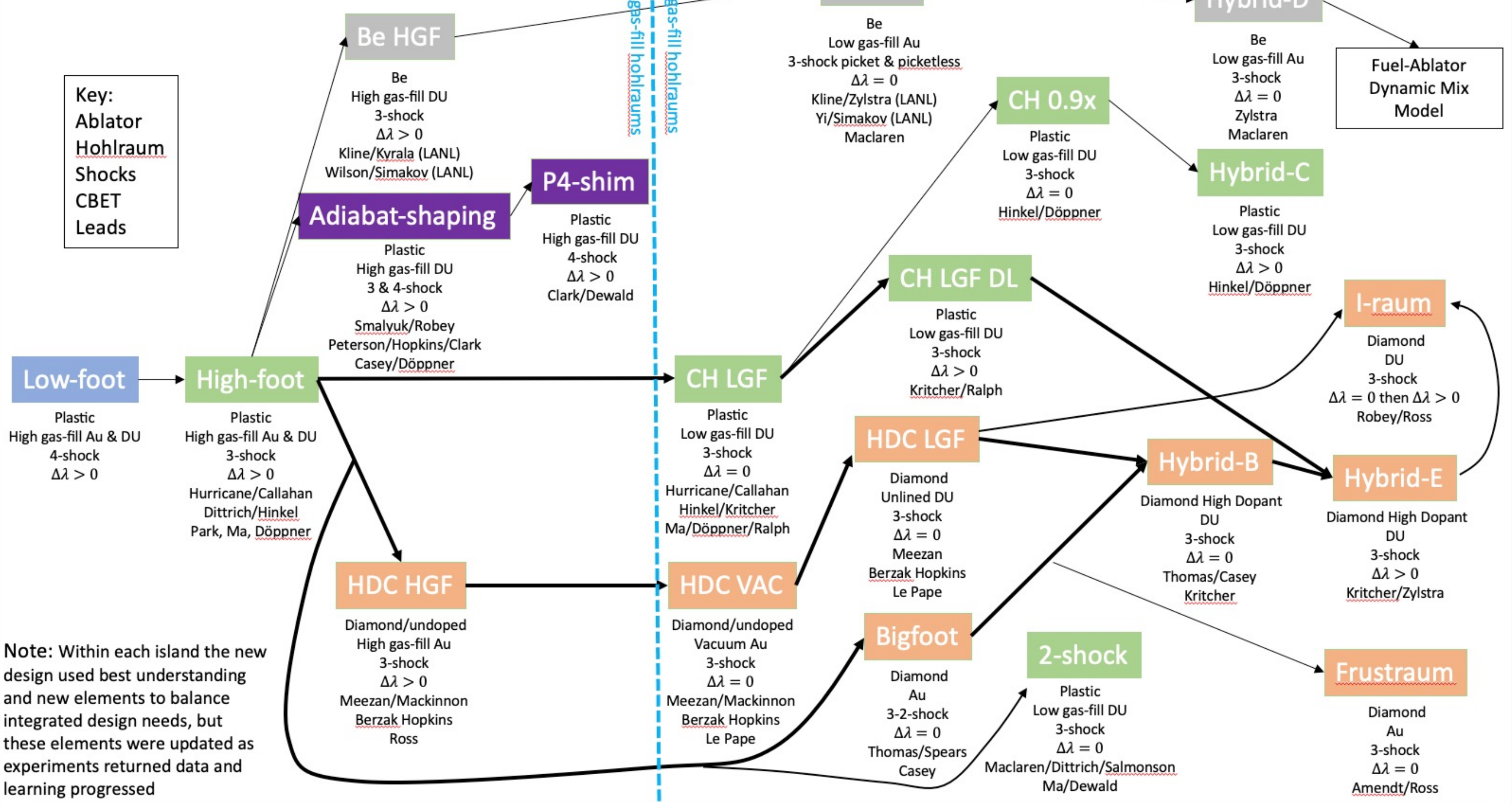
$$\phi \approx \frac{\rho R_{fuel}}{\rho R_{fuel} + 7}$$

Fraley, et al., Phys. Fluids, 17, 1974

Remarkable that we can now talk about burning plasmas, ignition, and scientific breakeven (G_{target} > 1) in the past-tense!

- No mystery physics obstacle stands in the way of ignition (explosive thermodynamic instability) or gain (energy out > energy in)
- The theoretical prediction of the physics parameter regime (e.g. Lawson triple product) where ignition was expected consistent with our results
- Additional laser energy (at fixed power) was very beneficial (”low coast time”)
- Implosion physics was more sensitive to engineering control of the laser and targets than originally thought
- So far, very high gain (high compression) target designs have not worked as expected. All break-throughs over the past decade have used low gain designs

Ignition Design Evolution Tree (2012-2021)



Note: Within each island the new design used best understanding and new elements to balance integrated design needs, but these elements were updated as experiments returned data and learning progressed