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News Release

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DARPA *Grand Challenge* Semifinal Opens With Historic Progress

First-day runs reflect dramatic advance for robotics, computer science technologies

Fontana, Calif. – Teams competing in the DARPA *Grand Challenge* today demonstrated dramatic progress in initial trial runs of robotic ground vehicles competing for a chance to win \$2 million in the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's upcoming desert field test.

DARPA Director Dr. Tony Tether said preliminary results from the first day of an eight-day semifinal event at the California Speedway are "unprecedented," and that they promise a fierce and determined competition for the *Grand Challenge* desert field test to be held at Primm, Nevada, on October 8.

On the first day of the semifinal, known as the National Qualification Event (NQE), 42 of the 43 semifinalist teams passed technical inspections to assure compliance with safety and basic performance parameters. Subsequently, 16 teams launched their initial runs along a 2.2-mile Speedway course designed to simulate conditions and obstacles that the robotic vehicles will encounter in the Mojave Desert. Seven of the 16 robots completed the trial run -- in stark contrast to the results of opening day of the 2004 DARPA *Grand Challenge* qualification event, in which only two teams made partial runs and six others failed to advance beyond the starting chutes.

"It is becoming increasingly clear that the entire field in the 2005 *Grand Challenge* has advanced significantly beyond what we saw in 2004," Dr. Tether said. "We are already preparing for a long, very competitive day in the desert on October 8."

The following teams saw their vehicles successfully complete their first trial runs today: *Mojavaton* (Colorado), *Stanford* (California), *Cimar* (Florida), *Red Team Too* (Pennsylvania), Team *Cornell* (New York), Team *Terramax* (Wisconsin), *Intelligent Vehicle Safety Technologies* (California). All 43 semifinalist teams will have multiple opportunities to participate in trial runs for the duration of the NQE, which culminates on October 5 with DARPA's announcement of the finalists for the 2005 *Grand Challenge*.

(more)

Grand Challenge Program Manager Ron Kurjanowicz said, “Even though this is only the first day of semifinal competition, these teams already have done the impossible.” He added: “What some of these teams were able to accomplish today would have been unthinkable a year ago. This is a great tribute to the hard work and competitive spirit of a community of young people, engineers, backyard mechanics, and innovators.”

The NQE continues at the California Speedway every day until 12:00 noon PDT on October 5. Although DARPA will not announce the 20 *Grand Challenge* finalists until late in the day of October 5 or early morning October 6, the agency will summarize results of the NQE trial runs the morn after the conclusion of each round; that is, each time all 43 semifinalists have completed a run. These postings may be found on the official event website at www.grandchallenge.org.

Spectators are welcome to witness the semifinal activities, which are conducted at the California Speedway in Fontana from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 pm. daily. Admission is free. Food and drink concessions are available; however, DARPA encourages spectators to bring plenty of water, a hat, and sun block.

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DARPA is the central research and development organization for the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). The agency manages research and development projects for the DoD and pursues research in technology areas where the risk can be very high, but success provides dramatic capability advances for the DoD.