



Harnessing American Ingenuity

News Release

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 28, 2005

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DARPA *Grand Challenge* Kicks Off With National Qualification Event

Forty-Three Teams to Compete at California Speedway for 20 Finalist Positions ; Rugged Two-Mile Test Track Awaits Field of Competitors Representing Variety of Backgrounds

Fontana, Calif. – The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) today kicks off the 2005 DARPA *Grand Challenge* with a semifinal competition known as the National Qualification Event (NQE) at California Speedway in Fontana, Calif., from Wednesday, September 28 through Wednesday, October 5. Thousands of team members, spectators, members of the media and event staff will be on hand, and an entire community of people who have been energized by this unique program will follow it closely from all over the world.

Team vehicles competing in the NQE will navigate a rugged course set up at the Speedway designed to simulate conditions found on the route for the *Grand Challenge* Event (GCE), including speed runs, tunnels, gates, narrow roads, mountain switchbacks, and man-made and natural obstacles. When the NQE ends on Wednesday, October 5, DARPA will announce a field of 20 finalists that will compete for a \$2 million cash prize in the GCE, culminating an intensive selection process conducted by DARPA that started with an original group of 195 applicants. The GCE will be held starting at sunrise on Saturday, October 8 on a 150-mile course that will begin and end in Primm, Nev.

DARPA selected the 43 semifinalists that are competing in the NQE after a year-long selection process that required teams to submit technical papers and demonstration videos, followed by site visits from DARPA technical experts who thoroughly evaluated the capability of each team's vehicle to autonomously navigate a narrow 200-meter course that contained turns and randomly placed obstacles. The field includes a diverse array of individuals and organizations from industry, the R&D community, government, the armed services, academia, high school and college students, backyard inventors, and automotive enthusiasts who are interested in a tough technical challenge and an important national cause.

“The *Grand Challenge* has sparked the interest of people all over the world and created an entire community dedicated to a quest that will enhance our national security,” said DARPA Director Dr. Tony Tether. “The quality of the field for the 2005 *Grand Challenge* offers strong evidence that

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we are succeeding in our mission to develop autonomous vehicle technology that will some day save the lives of Americans who are protecting our country on the battlefield.”

“Ever since we began evaluating the initial group of applicants for the 2005 *Grand Challenge*, it has been clear to us that the teams have made significant strides in the 18 months since the 2004 competition,” added Ron Kurjanowicz, *Grand Challenge* program manager and DARPA chief of staff. “There is no question that the entire field for the 2005 *Grand Challenge* has a much stronger grasp of autonomous vehicle technology than even the top participants in the 2004 competition.”

The inaugural DARPA *Grand Challenge* took place in March 2004, when 15 teams were selected as finalists to compete for a \$1 million prize. The 15 finalists in the 2004 *Grand Challenge* attempted to autonomously navigate a course between Barstow, Calif. and Primm, Nev., but the prize went unclaimed as no vehicles were able to complete the difficult desert route.

The *Grand Challenge* promises to attract widespread media interest, and DARPA will have a fully staffed media operation on-site at both the NQE and the GCE that will conduct a full range of media events and provide regular updates on-line and through regular news releases. Further information on how to cover this event and updates on the competition are available by visiting the media resources section of the official *Grand Challenge* website, www.darpa.mil/GrandChallenge.

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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.