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DARPA Plans Grand Challenge for Robotic Ground Vehicles

U.S. Department of Defense Agency Calls on Trailblazers and Pioneers from a Variety of Fields to Compete in 2004 Event and Spur New Robotics Innovations for the Battlefield Applications

Arlington, VA – The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has announced that next year it will conduct a Grand Challenge for autonomous robotic ground vehicles.

Scheduled for March 2004, the DARPA Grand Challenge for autonomous robotic ground vehicles will cover a course of approximately 300 miles between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, and the team that most quickly completes the route in less than the prescribed time will receive a cash prize of \$1 million. This challenge is intended to spur the accelerated development of autonomous robotic ground vehicle technology for military applications, and is the first in a series of Grand Challenges planned by DARPA.

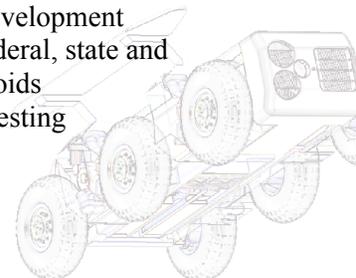
DARPA is calling for a trailblazers and pioneers in wide range of fields to become part of Grand Challenge teams, including advertisers and corporate sponsors, artificial intelligence developers, auto manufacturers and suppliers, computer programmers, futurists, inventors, motor sports enthusiasts, movie producers, off-road racers, remote-sensing developers, roboticists, science fiction writers, technology companies, universities, video game publishers, and other trailblazers.

“In order to make the DARPA Grand Challenge a success, we must maximize participation by everyone from major players to amateur enthusiasts,” said Col. Jose Negron, USAF, who is leading the Grand Challenge program for DARPA. “We will do everything we can to facilitate team-building and information exchange so that everyone who is interested in participating has an equal opportunity.”

One area of particular interest to participants and interested observers is the nature of the course, which will include a rugged combination of off- and on-road terrain that will be cleared of interfering vehicles. The route is still being finalized, and to develop it DARPA is drawing on the expertise of SCORE International, which has more than 30 years of experience successfully planning off-road vehicle events in California and Nevada.

“We have identified several options for routes between Los Angeles and Las Vegas that are feasible and meet all of the necessary regulations,” said Sal Fish, SCORE CEO/President, who is leading route development efforts. “Now we are working closely with the appropriate federal, state and local authorities to finalize a route that is not only safe and avoids environmentally protected areas, but will also make it an interesting challenge.”

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DARPA Grand Challenge organizers will continue to share information and facilitate team building through a variety of outreach activities leading up to October 14, 2003, when applicants' technical papers are due. The Grand Challenge web site – www.darpa.mil/grandchallenge – will serve as the gateway for updates on the event and a discussion forum for participants and interested observers.

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) is the central research and development organization for the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). The Agency manages and directs basic and applied research and development projects for DoD, and pursues research and technology where the risk and payoff are both very high and where success may provide dramatic advances for traditional military roles and missions.

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