



News Release

Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency

*The DARPA Grand Challenge –
harnessing American ingenuity, building
autonomous vehicles that save lives*

3701 North Fairfax Drive
Arlington, VA 22203-1714

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Contact: Thomas G. Goodwin
(703) 560-7875

Enthusiasm for DARPA Grand Challenge 2005 Autonomous Ground Vehicle Field Test Exceeds Expectations

31 Teams Submit Applications on First Day Alone

Over 550 individuals from 42 states and seven countries turned out August 14 for a first look at the preliminary rules, timetable for deadlines, and the qualification process for DARPA Grand Challenge 2005.

By the conclusion of the “Participants Conference” hosted by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), 31 teams had submitted applications, and 16 were from new entrants that had not competed in the first Grand Challenge field test on March 13, 2004. The deadline for submitting an application is February 11, 2005; DARPA officials said they expect to receive many more applications in the next weeks and months.

The DARPA Grand Challenge is a field test of autonomous ground vehicles over rugged terrain for the purpose of advancing robotics technology that will assist U.S. armed forces on the battlefield and save lives. At the first DARPA Grand Challenge, held in March 2004, 15 vehicles operating solely on robotics technology tried to complete a 142-mile route through the Mojave desert. None of the vehicles were able to complete the route, and DARPA decided to host another Grand Challenge event in 2005.

DARPA Director Anthony J. Tether said, “We all knew the first Grand Challenge had sparked a new interest in robotics technology across the nation. But the level of excitement here today exceeds our expectations. The turnout at this conference, and the level of interest expressed by people who could not attend, is a tribute to American ingenuity and to our collective spirit of teamwork and determination.”

Also at the Participants Conference, the agency released some key numbers and dates that soon will become familiar to all associated with DARPA Grand Challenge 2005:

- **40:** The number of teams that will advance to the semi-finals, known officially as the National Qualification Event and held September 28 to October 6, 2005. Semi-finalists will be announced June 1, 2005.
- **20:** The number of teams that will be selected to participate as finalists in the DARPA Grand Challenge event on October 8, 2005. Finalists will be announced on October 6, 2005.

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➤ **Summer 2005:** Announcement of the Grand Challenge route area.

At the conference, DARPA Grand Challenge 2005 Program Manager Ron Kurjanowicz celebrated the event as a “call to inventors from all walks of life. Here today we have engineers, mechanics, teenagers, retirees, backyard mechanics, high school students, and college students and professors.” Kurjanowicz also told participants that DARPA will issue the final rules governing the Grand Challenge on October 1, 2004. In discussing a new feature in the 2005 route, Kurjanowicz advised that the number one way to fail at the Grand Challenge is to “...turn off the autonomous vehicle’s sensors. DARPA will place obstacles on the route that, if undetected, will stop the autonomous vehicle. GPS navigation alone will not lead to success. Don’t turn off the vehicle’s sensors.”

The Participants Conference was followed by a two-hour “networking session” that facilitated communication among teams, potential team sponsors, and DARPA officials.

DARPA has doubled the prize offered for successful completion of the DARPA Grand Challenge: \$2 million will be awarded to the team whose autonomous vehicle successfully completes the 2005 route the fastest within a 10-hour time period.

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