'Look, Ma! No Hands!' DARPA Selects Philadelphia-Based Autonomous Car To Move Forward In National Competition

Lockheed Martin Provides Autonomy Technology to Driverless Automobile

Imagine driverless automobiles safely navigating the busy streets and pedestrian pathways of large cities nationwide. Imagine the vehicles stopping at red lights, avoiding errant drivers and traveling the most efficient routes.

The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has such an imagination. The federal agency selected Philadelphia-based "Little Ben" to move forward in its worldwide competition on autonomy called Urban Challenge. Eighty-nine entrants, mostly colleges and universities, are competing to build cars that intelligently and safely drive themselves through a 60-mile urban course in less than six hours. The cars must obey traffic laws while merging into moving traffic, navigating circles, negotiating busy intersections and avoiding obstacles.

"Little Ben" is a four-wheeled autonomous wizard masquerading as a Toyota Prius, and it's the brain child of the Ben Franklin Racing Team, a consortia led by the University of Pennsylvania with Lockheed Martin Advanced Technology Laboratories (ATL) and Lehigh University.

Because of its selection, "Little Ben" is now eligible to compete in the national qualifying trials on Oct. 26-31 at the urban military training facility located on the former George Air Force Base in Victorville, CA. The top 20 teams will move on to the Urban Challenge Competition on Nov. 3 also in Victorville. The three fastest finishers will receive cash prizes of $2 million, $1 million, and $500,000.

DARPA selected the Ben Franklin Racing Team to participate in the qualifying event after a successful site demonstration July 8 at Lehigh University. "Little Ben" navigated a four-way intersection and followed basic navigation and traffic laws, demonstrating its ability to avoid obstacles and predict and react intelligently to events. The car also successfully interacted with other vehicles by passing them at appropriate times and demonstrated an understanding of intersection precedence.

DARPA selected 53 of 89 total entrants for site demonstrations. Of those, the agency selected "Little Ben" and 35 others for qualifying trials.

As a member the University of Pennsylvania team, Lockheed Martin ATL is contributing behavior management and sensor fusion technologies to provide "Little Ben" with behavior and mission planning and high-level perception. It is also providing project management for the Urban Challenge team.

For more information on the Ben Franklin Racing Team and videos of "Little Ben": www.benfranklinracingteam.org

For more information on Urban Challenge: www.darpa.mil/grandchallenge

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Web site: http://www.atl.external.lmco.com/
http://www.darpa.mil/grandchallenge
http://www.benfranklinracingteam.org/

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