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TARTAN RACING WINS $2 MILLION PRIZE FOR DARPA URBAN CHALLENGE

Stanford Racing Wins $1 Million Second Prize, Victor Tango Takes Home $500,000 Third Prize

(Victorville, Calif.) – Tartan Racing's "Boss" of Pittsburgh, Penn., turned in the top performance in the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Urban Challenge and won the $2 million cash prize as the competition's first-place winner, DARPA announced today. Stanford Racing's "Junior" of Stanford, Calif., won the $1 million second place prize, while Victor Tango's "Odin" of Blacksburg, Va., received $500,000 for finishing third.

The Urban Challenge prize winners competed as part of a field of 11 finalists that was selected from 35 semifinalists that competed in the National Qualification Event (NQE) prior to the final event. Semifinalists were selected from the original field of 89 competitors. The NQE and the main event took place October 26 to November 3 at the former George Air Force Base in Victorville, Calif., that is used by the U.S. military to train for urban operations. The network of roads on the site effectively simulated the type of terrain American forces operate in when deployed overseas.

Vehicles that competed in the Urban Challenge were required to operate entirely autonomously, without human intervention, as they obeyed California traffic laws and performed maneuvers such as merging into moving traffic, navigating traffic circles and avoiding obstacles. The vehicles had to think like human drivers and continually make split-second decisions to avoid moving vehicles, merge into traffic and safely pass through intersections. Demonstrating safe operation in an urban situation was an effective and consolidated method of testing situations the vehicles might face even while conducting missions in less populated areas.

"The urban setting added considerable complexity to the conditions faced by the vehicles, and was significantly more difficult than the fixed desert courses featured in the first two Grand Challenges," added Urban Challenge Program Manager Dr. Norman Whitaker. "Tartan Racing, Stanford Racing, and Victor Tango all did a great job getting their vehicles to navigate the course quickly and safely despite the challenging conditions."

The DARPA Urban Challenge is the third in a series of competitions DARPA has held to foster the development of autonomous robotic ground vehicle technology to save lives on the battlefield by performing hazardous missions. The first Grand Challenge was held in March 2004 on a 142-mile desert course between Barstow, Calif. and Primm, Nev. Fifteen autonomous ground vehicles attempted the course, but none finished and the $1 million cash prize went unclaimed.

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"The 2004 event was equivalent to the Wright brothers flight at Kitty Hawk, where their airplane didn't fly very far but showed that flight was possible," DARPA Director Dr. Tony Tether explained. As with progress for airplanes after Kitty Hawk, the 2005 Grand Challenge had four autonomous vehicles that successfully completed a 132-mile desert route in southern Nevada under the required 10-hour limit, and DARPA awarded a $2 million prize to "Stanley" from Stanford University. Dr. Tether added, "I believe that the significant progress after 2004 was due to the fact that the community now believed that it could be done."

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ABOUT DARPA

DARPA is the central research and development organization for the Department of Defense (DoD). The Agency manages and directs basic and applied research and development projects for DoD and pursues research and technology that provide dramatic advances in support of military missions.