

A team of students from Manipal dare to launch driverless car within a year

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Univ is among 13 from country that qualified for the million-dollar 'driverless car challenge'

A team of 23 students led by Kumar Ranjan who recently graduated from Manipal University and works in Pune through Project Manas, aims to build an efficient driverless car suitable for Indian roads.

The team is hopeful of launching their driverless car within a year.

Many top universities are queued up to make the autonomous intelligent system for cars. The team qualified in the live presentation round held at the Mahindra Reva plant in Bengaluru recently, thus advancing to the prototyping stage. A total of 259 teams applied for the challenge, and 35 of them made it to the approach note phase. Of these, 31 qualified for the live presentation phase, and 13 went to the prototyping phase.

Kumar Ranjan said, "We were the only undergraduate team, that too from a private university, to qualify. Even as driverless cars are gaining popularity worldwide, India has a long way to go in this. We still do not have a policy on the concept. There are a lot of misconceptions about autonomous cars. We are first trying to create awareness through frequent online polls, for which the response so far has been good."

Since the global inception of this technology, a question being asked over and over is, if these autonomous cars are safe on the road. Also, are other road users safe with this artificial intelligence around?

"To an extent, it is unsafe. But that would only be in a scenario of the car being hacked or due to some irregularity in its algorithms. No one can deny the fact that the social impact of this technology is bound to be very high. Imagine a world without traffic jams, where a differently-abled person need not depend on someone to drive them, where ambulance response to an accident is in minutes, a world where a person can freely ride in a taxi during late nights and so on," said Ranjan.

It all began last year when Kumar Ranjan came across Mahindra's one million dollar challenge in which he wished to participate. Manipal University has been very supportive of his desire, providing a seed fund of `32 lakh.

Since then, the university has been working on the technical and management segments of the project. "Mahindra will give us a Reva e2o car to work on. For now, we are working on electric cars," he said.

"We are also working on different modules that will be integrated into one. The car is expected to be ready by December 2016 or January 2017. This car would be ideal as an ambulance or taxi. We will pitch for the defence forces to go in for our product. We want to be recognised globally. It's not just a Google, Tesla or Mercedes that can achieve this feat," he added.

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