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Insight Racing's Desert Rat is One of the Last "Bots" Standing

Triangle based, Insight Racing Team's Desert Rat computer driven Suburban was one of the last 3 robots on the DARPA Grand Challenge Course late Saturday. A finalist in the historic Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) Grand Challenge Race, the Desert Rat was still running after 17 of the 23 team field had stopped mid course in the Mojave Desert course. According to the Desert Rat's chase vehicle operators, the Desert Rat traversed some very difficult terrain, got into some deep sand and just kept going.

"We are very pleased with the endurance that our robotic vehicle showed in covering the desert course. It traveled through heavy sand storms and high winds, crossed a narrow bridge, drove under power lines, and continued its relentless pursuit in grueling conditions," said Grayson Randall, founder and team lead for Insight Racing. "After losing a key sensor early in the race, the Desert Rat continued another 20 miles on backup systems before becoming disabled. The perseverance of our vehicle allowed us to place 12th in traveled distance for the race."

The Desert Rat, developed in conjunction with NC State University passed many vehicles along its route including other university teams such as Cornell, Princeton, UCLA, Louisiana, Florida, and CalTech.

According to Walt Sliva, Business Manager for Insight, "Since 2003, Insight Racing has been hard at work designing this full-sized, robust, cost-effective vehicle that can travel with no human assistance over the course's rugged terrain."

The race posted a $2 Million winner-takes-all prize, which pitted full sized driverless autonomous vehicles against each other in a 132 mile race across rugged desert terrain in the Mojave Desert on October 8th. The race's official winner was announced on Sunday,October 9th as Stanford University's Stanley, a modified VW Toureg. Five robots finished the course, including Stanley, Carnegie Melon's Sandstorm, Carnegie Melon's Highlander, the Gray Team Kat-5, and Oshkosh's TerraMax.

Insight Racing earned a spot in the finals during a week long set of grueling elimination rounds held in California, from which DARPA whittled the field of 43 semi-finalists to the 23 best who ran on the Mojave Desert October 8th. The field was narrowed down to 23 participants from almost 200 entrants. Insight Racing is the only team from the Carolina's who competed in the semi-final and final rounds.

Driven by a Congressional mandate to convert one-third of the military vehicles to driverless computer-driven mode by 2015, the Department of Defense who authorizes and runs the event, believes the future holds great promise for autonomous vehicles to perform missions that put our men and women in uniform at risk. The $2 million prize goes to the vehicle that completes the course the fastest within a 10 hour time period.

The sensors on the 1987 Chevrolet Suburban permit it to drive unknown terrain, regulate its speed, and avoid obstacles just like a human driver. Insight appreciates the support of their sponsors who made participation possible and whose logos cover the vehicle, affectionately called the Desert Rat.
Sponsors are: NC State University, IBM, SAS, Red Hat, Ascot Technologies, BDMICRO, Comtrol, Council & Sons Repair Service, Crossbow, Frantz Automotive, Lord Corporation, PC MedEvac, SICK, and Smith Anderson.

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About Insight Racing: The Insight Racing Team is a cooperative venture between North Carolina State University and Insight Technologies, Inc., a company formed in 2003 to develop autonomous robotics solutions. Based in Cary, NC Insight Technologies brings together the best hardware and software into a cost effective integrated package for assistive and autonomous vehicle operation.

Earlier this year, Insight Racing s vehicle was the first entered in this event to successfully complete a rugged 2.7 mile course at Virginia international Raceway in a fully autonomous mode.

About the DARPA Grand Challenge: The DARPA Grand Challenge race has captured international attention because its full size driverless vehicle race stretches the limits of current technology know-how. Detailed information can be found at www.grandchallenge.org.

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