

iRobot Dips Toe into Pool-Cleaning Market

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Pool boys, you're on notice. iRobot has, in conjunction with AquaJet LLC and Aquatron, Inc., introduced not one, but two pool-cleaning robotics.

Unlike iRobot's Roomba , however, the Verros are not a home-grown automatons. They're actually Aquatron creations.

Aquatron has two pool cleaning robots on the market, the Aquabot and the Aquajet. The first looks very much like iRobot's new Verro 600 and the latter is a near match for the 300. iRobot's contribution is mainly the Scooba robotic floor- washing robot, its distinctive blue and white colors, and its not-insignificant brand recognition and market reach.

Like the Aquatron products, the Verro 300 and 600 – \$799 and \$1,199, respectively – can, according to iRobot officials, clean an entire 20-foot x 50-foot pool in 60 to 90 minutes.

The somewhat more affordable 300 works on gunite and concrete pools and uses water jets to clean out the pores and cracks often found in these environments. The 600, on the other hand, is equipped with brushes to scrub clean tile and vinyl. Both feature a vacuum that collects debris and fiber bags that filter water of fine particles, up to two microns.

Each rolling bot comes with a lengthy 50- to 60-feet power cord that plugs into an external transformer. According to company reps, each robot can be simply dropped into a pool and it will start to clean. The robot uses the simple and unchanging pool environment to its advantage

and, unlike Roomba and Scooba, does not need complex algorithms to navigate its environment. It is, however, aware of when it's on the bottom of the pool, moving along the vertical surfaces, and above water, and uses that information to "over clean" the pool, a company representative said.

A viewing of two demo videos on the iRobot web site that the 600 has a handle and two PVA roller brushes that double as wheels, while the 300 lacks a handle and uses four wheels. Each robot can roll along the bottom of the pools and on the vertical surfaces. In the videos, they appear to expel air bubbles to reach the bottom of the pool.

Unlike the robotic floor vacuum market, which iRobot all but invented, automatic pool cleaners have been around for decades. Still, iRobot's imprimatur raises the overall profile for robot pool cleaning. "There's a lot of opportunity in the pool cleaning robots," the iRobot representative said.

The two robots are available today at iRobot.com .

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