

NASA prepares for Moonbuggy Race

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The U.S. space agency is transforming part of the U.S. Space & Rocket Center into a lunar landscape for the 15th annual Great Moonbuggy Race.

By the end of the month about a half-mile of cement footpaths will be ready at the Huntsville, Ala., facility to test the engineering savvy and physical endurance of about 400 high school and college students in the April 4-5 event organized by National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Students from 20 states, Puerto Rico, Canada, India and Germany, will race lightweight moonbuggies they designed, based on the original lunar rovers used during the 1971 Apollo 15 moon mission. The vehicles will encounter 17 course obstacles that will be built to resemble moon-like ridges, craters, sandy basins and lava-etched "rilles."

Each rover is piloted by two students: one male, one female. The drivers must conquer each obstacle without exceeding the race's 15-minute time limit -- a new rule this year.

"That camaraderie is exciting to see," said Tammy Rowan, manager of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center's Academic Affairs Office. "The race doesn't just pit schools against one another. It's a shared experience for students who love math, science and engineering."

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