

# Review: iRobot's smart mop could use some muscle

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In this product photo provided by iRobot Corp., the Scooba 230, is shown. The engineers at iRobot Corp. continue to fill the world with wondrous robots, the latest being a compact floor-washing machine called the Scooba 230.(AP Photo/iRobot Corp.) NO SALES

The engineers at iRobot Corp. continue to fill the world with wondrous robots, the latest being a compact floor-washing machine called the Scooba 230.

I tested the \$300 robot on some kitchen and bathroom floors, pockmarked with the spills, splashes and bipedal activity of your typical four-person, one-dog household. The dog is a bit bipedal, too, when he's up on hind legs asking for treats. And he's messy with them, which is where the robot comes in.

The device smartly covered rooms of various sizes with its unique path-plotting software methods, though I soon learned that making a [floor](#) truly clean is better accomplished using old-fashioned elbow grease.

This is not to say the Scooba 230 didn't perform as designed. By definition, it is a floor-washing robot that can make an already-swept floor cleaner. It simply doesn't have the abrasive scrubbing power necessary to get up most common spills that would simple take a few seconds of me and a mop.

But I don't mop often, so perhaps my clean-floor quotient is enhanced regardless of how well the robot scrubs.

After all, some cleaning is better than none.

The Scooba 230 is an improvement over the original Scooba, which costs \$100 more.

The original is twice as wide and didn't fit under the kitchen sink faucet, making it unwieldy to load with water. The pint-sized Scooba 230 is small enough to fit when it's time to fill it with warm, clean water, or to discard the dirty water. It also weaves its way around chair legs and into corners better than its predecessor. So for owners of the earlier model, this is an improvement if your hard-to-reach corners were left uncleaned.

The set-up for the new model is simple. After inserting the battery and

charging the robot overnight, I simply filled it with water and put in a small packet of iRobot's liquid cleaner. I placed it in the middle of the kitchen floor, pressed the power button and then the "clean" button. A few beeps later it was time to back off, hide the dog and watch the Scooba 230 do its thing.

It went about its business as you would imagine pranksters would while laying down crop circles in a corn field. It made a few straight lines here and a few spiraling circles there. It bumped into walls and then quickly remapped itself to head off in another direction.

It seemed to learn the room after a while, and I rarely caught it going through the same routes twice, though the folks at iRobot tell me it employs an "adaptive algorithm," which allows it to learn and smartly cover the entire floor in multiple passes.

The Scooba 230 does not pick up loose debris, so a good sweep beforehand is essential. I caught the robot dragging around a few hairs in the bathroom, indicating I could have done a better job with the broom there.

I was left wanting more. I didn't enjoy having to sweep up after the Scooba 230, which I had to do because I had missed some spots beforehand, causing Scooba to drag some debris around.

The folks at [iRobot](http://www.irobot.com) also make robotic gutter cleaners and industrial strength robots for military applications. But the final frontier may still be, quite simply, conquering a proper scour of the kitchen floor. And they've come up just a bit short with this [robot](#).

**More information:** <http://www.irobot.com/scooba230>

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