

'Shrinkable car' makes parking a breeze at high-tech fair

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A car that retracts to fit into a smaller parking space is seen at the world's biggest high-tech fair, the CeBIT in Hanover, central Germany.

Scientists at the world's biggest IT fair unveiled on Tuesday what they hope is the car of the future that can shrink to fit tight parking spaces and pick you up at the touch of a button.

At just 2.10 metres (seven feet) long, the futuristic cobalt-blue two-seater "pod" is not exactly roomy but was pulling in the crowds

nevertheless with its extraordinary features.

If a parking space looks too small, drivers can reduce the car's length by 50 centimetres. For further ease, the wheels can turn in a full circle, allowing a driver to pull up to a space and then move sideways into it.

With built-in [sensors](#) to avoid collisions, the car can also drive itself and can be summoned by smartphone, explained Timo Birnschein, the project leader, from the German Centre for [Artificial Intelligence](#).

"If you are in the office, you can press a button on your smartphone and it will come and pick you up. We already have the technology to do this. It will be happening in five to six years," he said.

His team of 10 has been working on the car for 15 months and hope to make it roadworthy in the very near future.

It has a top speed of 55 kilometres (35 miles) per hour and a range of 100 kilometres when its two batteries are fully charged. It creates additional energy from the turning of its wheels.

But the real innovation, explained Birnschein, is its ability to "dock" with other similar cars to create what he called "road trains" of up to 20 cars, driven by just the person at the front.

In this configuration, all the cars automatically share the energy available

At the moment, it is just a prototype, so there is no estimate on the potential cost of the technology.

And with space at a premium, there is currently no room for storage.

"We're working on that," promised Birnschein.

The [CeBIT](#) runs until March 10, with around 4,200 [exhibitors](#) from 70 countries showcasing the latest technology.

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