

Robots do battle over Mars exploration

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The "Scorpio" Mars rover constructed by students of the Polish Wroclaw University, at the European Rover Challenge 2014 on September 4, 2014 in Checiny, Poland

Robots built to traverse the rugged terrain of Mars battled it out in Poland on Friday in a competition to find the best way to explore the Red Planet.

The European Rover Challenge 2014 has drawn competitors from as far

as Colombia, Egypt and India, keen to prove their machines have what it takes to conquer the giant mountains and unforgiving canyons of Earth's neighbour.

The automated vehicles, designed to emulate NASA's Mars rover explorers, will be tested performing four tasks on red soil imitating the surface of Mars.

Tasks include surface exploration, helping an injured astronaut, gathering soil samples and searching for signs of life.

"At last, our robot Scorpio 4 is ready for the competition," Szymon Dzwonczyk, a 21-year-old student at the Wroclaw University of Technology in southern Poland, told AFP.

"It's a four-wheeled modular build that can be used in different ways for scientific exploration," he said.

An early version of his team's robot won second place in last year's global University Rover Challenge, organised by NASA in a Utah desert.

First place went to students from Bialystok, in eastern Poland.

"Coming second made us want to work harder," says Dzwonczyk, who is also hoping to attract commercial interest in the versatile machine.

The weekend competition is being organised by the Polish branch of the International Mars Society, focused on "furthering the exploration and settlement of the Red Planet," according to its website.



Members of the Kielce University of Technology team watch their "Impuls" Mars rover before the European Rover Challenge 2014 on September 5, 2014 in Checiny, Poland

Under way in Checiny, southern Poland, the European Rover Challenge is open to the public.

NASA experts are expected to attend a conference on its sidelines exploring humans in space.

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