

Robots massage, clean, and amuse at CES

January 8 2011, by Glenn Chapman

The world's first massage robot was at the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas to soothe those sore from dashing about the gargantuan gadget extravaganza.

Palm-sized WheeMe massagers made by Israel-based startup DreamBots were in a newly established CES robotics zone with creations ranging from therapeutic mechanical seals to playful lifelike baby dinosaurs.

"It gives you a nice tickling feeling," Karen Slutzky of DreamBots said as a WheeMe maneuvered independently on the back of a woman laying on a massage table at CES, which ends Sunday.

"It is a gentle skin massage; very relaxing. And, it doesn't fall off."

Curvy, car-shaped WheeMe units have wheels designed with "fingerlettes" and the robots vibrate.

Invented by Slutzky's husband, Eyal Avramovich, the robots use feedback from sensors to not ride off backs or stomachs and to stop at waistlines.

"It doesn't know where it has been, but it knows where not to go," Slutzky said. "We are working on making it smarter so it can go up onto the bum and down onto the leg."

The couple was showing prototypes at CES and looking for a partner to bring models to the US market late this year.

Elsewhere in the robotics zone, Takatoshi Kuno of Cyberdine in Japan demonstrated a mechanized "suit" for helping the elderly or paralyzed walk.

[Robot Suit HAL](#) ([hybrid assistive limb](#)) consisted of a waist harness and mechanized extensions strapped to a user's legs. The suit read impulses from nerves in the legs to enable people to walk.

"I want to make a Tony Stark 'Iron Man' suit, but it will take a while," Kuno said in a playful reference to the comic and film hero.

About 160 HAL suits are being rented by hospitals or home care facilities in Japan for use by the elderly and Cyberdine was also at CES looking for a partner with the clout to get the [robotic devices](#) into the US.

Paro was in the zone with fluffy robotic seals certified as a medical devices by the US Food and Drug Administration.

The Japan-based company pitched the seals as therapeutic aids for older people suffering from depression or dementia.

Sensors in the 6,000-dollar robotic seals let them react to light, touch, and voices.

"Over time it develops a personality and can be trained like an actual pet," a Paro spokesman said. "But, they can go places pets are not allowed."

A third-generation of Pleo toy robot dinosaurs first released in 2007 touted improvements including voice recognition and reacting to temperature and odors.

If left out in frigid weather, a Pleo RB (reborn) will catch a cold. On hot days the robots pant from exertion. The faux dinosaurs will play tug-of-war with human companions.

If a Pleo RB falls from a table, it will be sore and need to be nursed back to health, according to Derek Dotson of US-based Innvo Labs, the company behind the robotic toys.

"It can learn tricks, and when it dances it even shakes its booty a little," Dotson said. "It has always been our goal to blur the line between the robotic and the biological."

Pleo RB hit the market days before Christmas with a 469-dollar price tag and has "pretty much sold out," according to Dotson.

The zone also featured small robots for vacuuming or mopping floors, and a 400-dollar Windoro [robot](#) that cleaned windows.

Square, lightweight Windoro halves used magnets to sandwich glass and then zipped about, scrubbing one side at a time with microfiber pads.

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