

No winner in 'space elevator' competition

24 October 2005

It sounds like science fiction, but a competition was held during the weekend for the design of a "space elevator."

A three-day competition at NASA's Ames Research Center in Mountain View, Calif., ended Sunday, but with no winner.

Competitors tried to design a "space elevator" -- a platform rising above the Earth's atmosphere along a super-strong ribbon of carbon nanotubes. The elevator would carry cargo into space at a much lower price than do rockets today.

The seven "robot climbers" entered in the competition didn't ascend more than a few dozen feet up a tether attached to a giant crane, the San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News reported, therefore none performed well enough to win the \$50,000 grand prize.

But the Mercury News noted the competitors broke a barrier of sorts by proving the idea is not just science-fiction fantasy.

Two teams developed space elevators that were able to rise along the tether using power converted from spotlights.

"It was amazing to watch these silent machines gliding on light," said Marc Schwager of the Spaceward Foundation, which organized the competition. "Two college teams came in and showed industry how to build a space elevator."

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