

Press release: RACE DRIVEN to support driverless cars

RACE – UKAEA’s state of the art robotics technology centre at Culham Science Centre – is to consolidate its position as a test site for driverless cars as a number of major investments in this area were announced today.

These projects will play a key role in putting the first driverless cars on public roads in the coming years. Most notable is the DRIVEN consortium* led by award-winning driverless car developers Oxbotica and including RACE. DRIVEN has received over £8m in funding from the Government’s CCAV (Centre for Connected and Autonomous Vehicles) £13m investment in this area. This will go towards developing and operating a fleet of vehicles to operate on public roads, with complete autonomy, within the next two and half years. The project will culminate with these vehicles travelling autonomously from London to Oxford (with safety drivers on board as a precaution) – as a public demonstration of the viability of this technology.

RACE will play a key role in the project. Oxbotica’s main field test activities are conducted from their base in the RACE building, and they make use of the 10 kilometres of roads, junctions, roundabouts (even traffic lights and pedestrian crossings) within the closed Culham site; a perfect ‘test track’ for these vehicles to test their ability to monitor and react to other vehicles, cyclists and people in realistic circumstances, whatever the weather. This latest funding comes amid strong support for the whole robotics and artificial intelligence community. ‘Cutting edge artificial intelligence and robotics systems that will operate in extreme and hazardous environments’ will benefit from a £270m Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund announced in the 2017 Spring Budget, and a recent House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report recommended the route ahead to harness the huge potential of connected and autonomous vehicles.

RACE Director Rob Buckingham said:

RACE has been working with Oxbotica for some time now. The DRIVEN team brings together the right combination of interests and enthusiasm to change the conversation in this exciting field from mostly speculation to real world detail. DRIVEN will show how autonomous vehicles will change the world, both for the public and industrial users.

DRIVEN is important because it will answer questions around cyber security and insurance as well as the underlying technology. RACE has a key supporting role: enabling testing on the Culham Science Centre site before we venture on the public roads. DRIVEN reinforces our aspiration to enable connected and autonomous

vehicles to be widely adopted. Starting in Oxfordshire we are already thinking about how autonomous vehicles fit within a modern transport plans for both Oxford and Didcot Garden Town. DRIVEN is a very important step on this journey.

*The DRIVEN consortium is led by Oxbotica Ltd.; the other partners in the project are the Oxford Robotics Institute, insurer XL Catlin, Nominet, Telefonica, the Transport Research Laboratory, UKAEAs RACE facility, Oxfordshire County Council, Transport for London and Westbourne Communications.

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