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ESA announces winners of Aurora student design competition

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After a keenly fought contest between teams from all over Europe and Canada, the winners of the first Aurora Student Design Competition were announced early this week.

Officially launched in January 2003, in cooperation with the ESA Education Office, the competition was intended to inspire young academics who felt they could contribute innovative ideas, concepts and technologies to enhance Europe's long-term Aurora programme for the robotic and human exploration of the solar system.

Design entries were invited for five categories: Arrow and Flagship missions, New Enabling Technologies, Surface Robotics and Human missions. Altogether 17 teams – a minimum of three from each of the categories - were selected to go forward for the final phase, held at the Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya (UPC) in Barcelona on 8-9 September.

After a series of 15-minute presentations, followed by question and answer sessions, the difficult task of selecting the eventual winners was passed to an expert jury, chaired by Professor Jean-Pierre Swings, Chairman of the ESA/Aurora Exploratory Programme Advisory Committee (EPAC). The jury was made up of two other EPAC members together with Franco Ongaro, the Aurora Programme Manager and six more Aurora officials.

"All of the presentations were of a high technical quality and some teams even showed a mock-up of their projects or elements of it," said Piero Messina, the competition organiser. "Most of the teams allowed all of their members to participate, making the presentations lively and absorbing. The atmosphere was also enhanced by the mix of European and Canadian accents and the variety of the entries, particularly the egg-shaped spinning robot entered by the team from the University of Limerick."

After careful deliberation, the section winners were announced, together with six special prizes for other, particularly noteworthy, entries.

"It was not an easy task and it was felt that, given the quality

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of the work presented by the students, two additional special prizes should be awarded," said Messina.

The winners of each category are:

Arrow class missions:
Phobice - Helsinki University of Technology, Finland

Flagship class missions:
Prometeo - Politecnico di Milano, Italy

Human missions:
Mars Excursion Module - Cranfield University, UK

New enabling technologies:
P.R.E. Mars - EPFL, Lausanne, Switzerland

Surface robotics:
TODDLER - University of Leicester, UK/University of Hamburg, Germany

First prize in each category is a four-day trip to ESA's European Space Research and Technology Centre (ESTEC) in the Netherlands. The visit will include a tour of the ESTEC facilities, and the possibility for teams to conduct in-depth discussions about their projects with ESA experts.

Special prizes were awarded to:

ARGO - Politecnico di Milano, Italy
LADYFLY - Politecnico di Milano, Italy
H-STRAW - International Space University, Strasbourg, France
MDRS - Kingston University, UK
The Moonlight Project - Universitat Politecnica de Catalunya, Spain
PHAROS - Politecnico di Milano, Italy

Each of these teams was offered a choice between a trip to Europe's spaceport in Kourou, French Guiana, and a visit to an international conference e.g. the 2004 IAF meeting in Vancouver.

The Aurora Programme office gratefully acknowledges the hard work of the UPC organising team, headed by Professor Ignasi Casanova. Within the next few weeks preliminary details of the second Aurora Student Design Competition will be announced.