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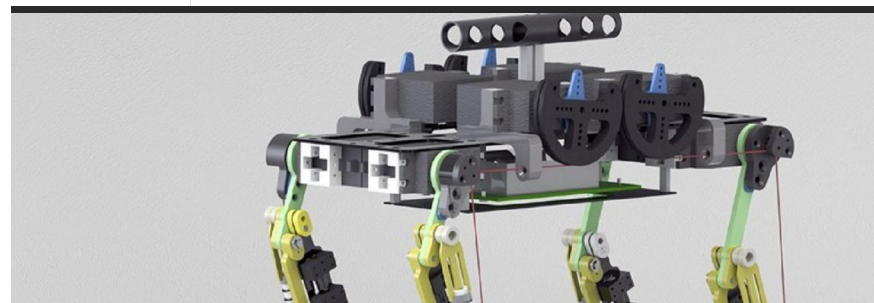
TECHNOLOGY

# Robot that runs like a cat springs to life in Switzerland

POSTED: 18 Jun 2013 12:50 AM TREND

Swiss researchers said Monday they have created a small four-legged, high-speed robot that runs like a cat in a bid to create a new breed of robots for use in search and rescue operations.

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GENEVA: Swiss researchers said Monday they have created a small four-legged, high-speed robot that runs like a cat in a bid to create a new breed of robots for use in search and rescue operations.

Researchers added that the "cheetah-cub robot," the size of a small house cat or cheetah cub, moves as fast as an adult human walking briskly.

It is "the fastest in its category (of) small quadruped robots under 30 kilos (66 pounds)," the EPFL technical university in Lausanne said in a statement.

The robot recorded a maximum speed of 1.42 metres (4.65 feet) per second, corresponding to 5.1 kilometres (3.1 miles) per hour.

"This is a good walking speed for an adult human," one of the researchers on the project, Alexander Sprowitz, told AFP in an email.

The robot's metallic frame is 20.5 centimetres (eight inches) long and 16 centimetres high and weighs 1.1 kilogrammes (2.42 pounds).

The robot, which was featured Monday in the International

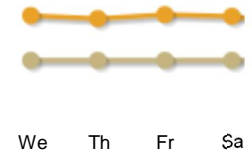
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Journal of Robotics Research, has a tail but no head, yet is easily recognisable as modelled on a cat due to its gait.

"Its particularity is the design of its legs, which make it very fast and stable," EPFL said, pointing out that the purpose of building the robot was to encourage research in biomechanics.

The "cheetah cub" was not yet as agile as a real cat, but "still has excellent auto-stabilisation characteristics when running at full speed or over a course that included disturbances such as small steps," it stressed.

To make the robot's legs, the researchers used springs to reproduce tendons and actuators, or small motors that convert energy into movement, to replace muscles.

The robot also has the benefit of being "extremely light, compact, and robust," EPFL said, pointing out that it "can be easily assembled from materials that are inexpensive and readily available."

Although the research still is in the very early stages, the researchers said the long-term goal was to "develop fast, agile, ground-hugging machines for use in exploration, for example for search and rescue in natural disaster situations."

The technology could also be used to gain a better understanding why animal legs are built the way they are, and provide "insights into the control architecture of animals," Sprowitz said.

He pointed out that the technology could reduce the need to dissect animals, and could potentially have a "strong impact on

human locomotion rehabilitation."

- AFP/sb

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