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# DESIGNER TOM'S ROBOT WALKS IT

## QUAKE AID: Device beats rivals for world finals spot

Dan Hearn

**A STUDENT is celebrating after a life-saving robot he helped design won a prestigious European competition.**

Tom Astley, 22, from South Moreton, near Didcot, was part of a team from Warwick University competing in the RoboCup Rescue Championship in Germany.

The team's creation, which has been designed to help find earthquake survivors in collapsed buildings when it is too dangerous to send in search teams, won the competition after impressing judges with its adaptability.

All competing rescue robots operated in a simulated disaster environment and were given points for every 'person' they found.

Last night Mr Astley said he was delighted.

He said: "This was a great result for all of us and was the culmination of a lot of hard work and preparation.

"Our robot scored the highest points and we were delighted to win.

"It is a really big competition and we beat seven other teams who had qual-

ified from across Europe. It was hard work but worth it."

Mr Astley, who is in the fourth year of a mechanical engineering degree, said recent earthquakes in Haiti and China showed there was a need for his type of robot.

He said: "They can play an increasingly important role in saving people.

"There were a lot of decent ideas on

show. We were up against teams who have been going to the competition for years.

"We must have made an impression, which is nice."

He said the team's major advantage was the unique capabilities of the robot's arm.

It is more flexible than the neck of an owl and can move in tight situations and change direction without having to adjust the whole robot.

Mr Astley and his colleagues have now won a place in the World RoboCup Rescue Championship in Singapore in June.

He said: "As well as getting a trophy, you also receive a place in the world championship.

"We are now looking for sponsors because it is going to be very expensive to get all of us and a robot over to Singapore."

The RoboCup Rescue Championship project was launched following the Great Hanshi-Awaji earthquake in Japan in 1995, which killed more than 6,500 people and destroyed 80,000 wooden houses in the city of Kobe.

Prof Ken Young, of Warwick University, praised the team. He said: "They have done incredibly well and I am always so impressed by what they manage to achieve.

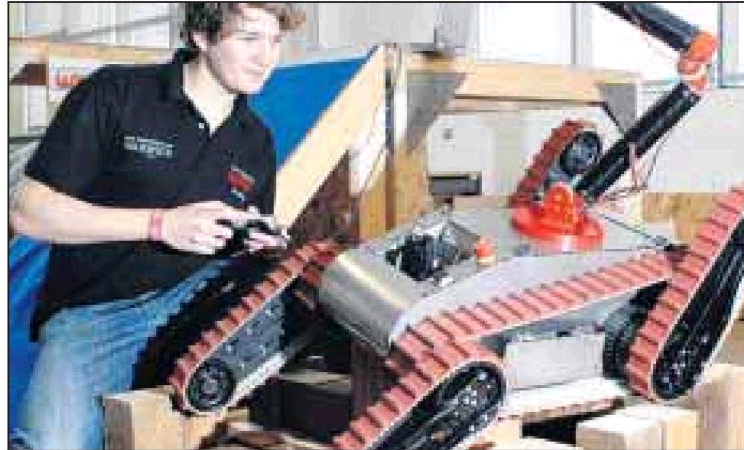
"It would be immense to go to Singapore and show the world just what British education and engineering is all about."

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**INGENIOUS:** Tom Astley with the team's rescue robot

