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# ROBOT SAILBOAT OUT TO BREAK WORLD RECORD



The unmanned sailing boat will cover 150 nautical miles and work for 100 hours without human intervention.

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### THE GIST

- An autonomous sailboat designed by Austrian scientists is programmed to cover 150 nautical miles.
- The boat's solar panels generate up to 285 watts of energy in full sun.
- During its journey the vessel will collect data on a Baltic Sea porpoise.

Austrian scientists are looking to break the record for the longest journey made by a fully autonomous sailboat, all while collecting data on a Baltic Sea porpoise.

Scientists from the Austrian Society of Innovative Computer Sciences hope their craft, named the ASV Roboat, will cover 150 nautical miles (172 miles) and work for 100 hours without human intervention once it is put into the water July 9. The current record is 78.9 nautical miles (91 miles), set in March by a robot

The "ASV Roboat" is a fully autonomous, unmanned sailing boat. [Click to enlarge this image.](#)  
 Roboat

sailboat made by the French engineering institute ENSTA Brest.

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Robotic sailboats need human handlers only to enter final destination coordinates. The boats decide routes, perform [sailing maneuvers](#) and respond to changing winds on their own. They also generally make all the power they need, through solar panels. They need relatively little energy to move the sail and rudder while the wind provides the propulsion.

Interest in robot sailboats has picked up since 2005, when two engineers established the Microtransat, which challenges teams to create sailboats that can cross the Atlantic Ocean on their own. So far no one has succeeded.

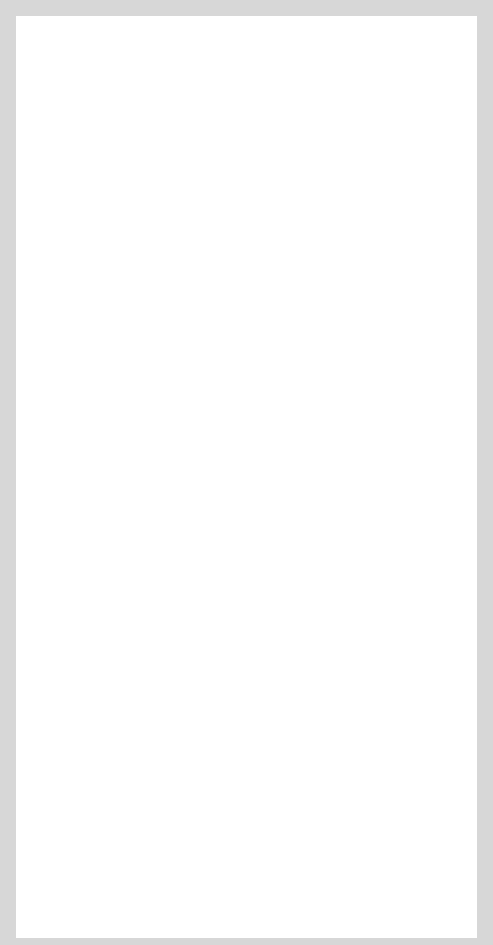
The Roboat, however, has won a spinoff competition, the World Robotic Sailing Championships, since that competition's inception in 2008. The Roboat is based on a sailboat made to teach kids, so it's small and stable. Sensors including GPS, a compass and a wind speed detector help it decide routes and maneuver in the wind. Its solar panels generate up to 285 watts of energy in full sun, while a methanol-powered [fuel cell](#) provides backup power. A wireless communication system lets researchers track where it is and download data it gathers while it's still at sea.

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For the porpoise project, the Roboat will carry an underwater microphone to capture the clicks and cackles made by the endangered harbor porpoise in the Baltic Sea. Researchers hope to learn more about these porpoises' migration routes, mating sites and communication behavior, [according to the Roboat website](#).

In the future, technology developed for the Roboat could help in a variety of at-sea tasks besides eavesdropping on marine mammals. "These solar energy-powered robotic sailing boats can also be used for tsunami early-warning systems, search operations, meteorological measurements and the recovery of oil spills," said the Roboat's project manager, Roland Stelzer.

Roboat's creators also wrote on the vessel's website that Roboat tech can go into automatic safety systems for human-sailed boats. Sailors can delegate some tasks to the system. The system might even detect



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someone falling overboard and move to rescue the person.

Autonomous sailboats also can work as environmentally friendly, endlessly powered vessels for supplying people on remote islands or for spying on smuggler vessels.

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