

UCI team's Hyperloop pod is ready to race in SpaceX competition on Sunday



UC Irvine students on the HyperXite team work on their creation for Sunday's SpaceX Hyperloop Pod Competition at SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne. The competition aims to speed up the development of a prototype for a high-speed ground transportation system. (Courtesy of HyperXite team)



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When a handful of [UC Irvine](#) students heard about the [SpaceX](#) Hyperloop Pod Competition almost two years ago, they began work on their own designs in hopes of building a prototype for a high-speed ground transportation system.

Now, after beating out hundreds of other students during project submissions and the Design Weekend last year, the 50-member UCI team will have its project in Weekend I of the contest on Sunday at SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne.

Hyperloop, a concept for a high-speed ground transport system, was introduced in 2013 by Elon Musk, founder of Tesla Motors and SpaceX.

SpaceX, which designs, manufactures and launches rockets and spacecraft, announced the contest in June 2015, inviting university students and independent engineering teams to build functional, scale-model Hyperloop pods.

Through the competition, SpaceX hopes to speed up the development of a prototype for a safer, faster, less expensive and more sustainable mode of transportation, according to the company's website.

The UCI team qualified for Sunday's event after its project took fifth place in the contest's Design Weekend in January 2016 at Texas A&M University.

That weekend, the students presented the designs for their HyperXite pod, which is built to float on a thin film of air and to brake using electromagnets.

The project bested more than 100 others, including the UCLA Hyperloop and UC San Diego's TritonLoop.

For competition Weekend I, more than 30 international teams will test their pods on a 1-mile track built last year for the contest.

According to the HyperXite team's project manager, Mackenzie Puig-Hall, the Anteaters' pod is designed to run up to 230 mph.

The HyperXite that the team brought to the competition is about 14 feet long and 4 feet wide, about half the scale of the envisioned pod, which would fit 28 passengers.

The team kept the pod's weight down by building it from aluminum, carbon fiber and other lightweight materials.

"Right now we're focused on proving to SpaceX that our pod is safe," Puig-Hall said.

The team will place an Anteater mascot doll in the pod as its speeds down the test track, she said.

Besides UCI, the Berkeley and Santa Barbara campuses are the only other University of California schools participating Sunday. Competitors also are coming from Germany, Canada and throughout the United States.

"Everything I did [as an engineering student] was on paper," said Gregory Washington, dean of the Henry Samueli School of Engineering at UCI. "They get to build something that can change the matter in which we live, and that is really, really cool. You just can't beat it."

Puig-Hall said the team will use its experience on the test track to make any necessary modifications to the pod for the next phase of the contest.

A date for competition Weekend II has not been determined.