

Invention fair shows ideas ranging from wild to whacky

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Whether showing off a motion-detection machine that could save millions of lives or a cheeky little device that reminds men to put the toilet seat down after use, inventors from around the planet gathered here Wednesday for the world's largest inventions fair. More than 580 of the world's most creative — and crackpot — minds have set up their stands at the International Exhibition of Inventions to show off brainchilds ranging from heavy-duty engineering feats to handy little items like a device that automatically tees your golf ball — no bending required. The fair, running until Sunday, features 1,000 totally new inventions of all kinds by industrial and commercial companies, independent researchers and even Joe Averages simply looking for a way to end bad breath or stop toiletries from spilling onto suit jackets while travelling. Among this year's most noteworthy creations are the anti-mine shoe, a French invention that prevents the user from stepping on mines and munitions using electro-stimulation, and a system allowing open-heart surgery under any conditions, presented by a Russian. A device to detect and monitor concealed objects and bodies — so sensitive it can feel an ant's heartbeat — can be used for everything from finding people trapped under rubble to monitoring the breathing of newborns. The appliance, submitted by Jordanian cousins, can detect a finger moving through a one-metre-thick concrete wall. "I originally invented it as a way to detect trees infested with worms," said Yosri Haj-Yousef, a medical electronic engineer. "But no one cared enough about the trees so I had to find another use for it." From France comes an ecologically friendly process of refining used oil while generating only safe and usable byproducts such as bitumen, hydrocarbon fuel and liquid fertilizer. But the "invention convention" also draws a crowd for its nutty-professor contraptions. This year, visitors will likely get a chuckle from a variety of items including:

- ⌘ A "state of the art" device to strengthen vaginal muscles, the latest in "intelligent sexual management."
- ⌘ Wizard, the first robotized golf cart which faithfully follows a person around without remote control, thanks to a computerized ultrasound system.
- ⌘ An apparatus to help people slip on stockings, socks, tight-fitting garments and underwear. For some inexplicable reason, toilets seem to be in the hot-seat this year, time spent alone and undisturbed no doubt inspiring the extensive range of gimmicks on

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display:

- ⌘ The All-Round Toilet Seat, a designer version of the usual thing with interchangeable clocks, radio/CD player, flashing lights or lottery games set in the cover. It comes in all colours, including sequined silver.
- ⌘ The Little Toilet Genius, a talking device to be slipped under the seat, reminding men of toilet etiquette by delivering warnings such as “don’t go wetting this floor, cowboy, you never know who’s behind you, so sit down and put your water pistol in the bowl where it belongs” (followed by sinister laughter).
- ⌘ The Autonomous Public Toilet Seat, which — thanks to an acoustic signal — animates itself, whistles and applauds. A lighter model for private use is also available.
- ⌘ The Anti-Sloshing Lid for Lavatories. A 68-member jury will select the best invention and award prizes in 35 different categories. On the basis of a popular vote from visitors, the “Oscar of Inventions” is also awarded. The majority of the exhibits are expected to draw serious interest from industrialists, businessmen and distributors, with 45 per cent each year gaining licensing contracts. Inventions can be entered only once at the Geneva show and must be patented. The war in Iraq and the SARS epidemic deprived the fair of about 60 participants, mainly from Israel, Malaysia and Hong Kong, organizers said.



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