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BlueRobotics Propels Itself to Cool Idea! Award

Proto Labs recognises Thruster-100 system for innovation in marine mobility.

MAPLE PLAIN, MINN.—May 6, 2014—Proto Labs (NYSE: PRLB) has presented a Cool Idea! Award to the team at BlueRobotics for their development work on the Thruster-100 propulsion system for robotic marine vehicles.

BlueRobotics designed the compact Thruster-100 as a low-cost motor and propeller unit that users can affix to remotely operated underwater vehicles and small surface vessels for aquatic exploration. A plastic framework integrated with a brushless electric motor enables the thruster to operate continuously for months at a time, navigate into deep waters and resist the corrosive nature of ocean saltwater.

By drastically reducing the hardware expense typically associated with buying a thruster, the company hopes to provide a more accessible entry point for hobbyists, educators, students and professionals. “There’s a developing community of people online who are doing marine robotics projects for fun and ecological reasons and they’re all having the same problem — they don’t have an affordable underwater thruster,” says engineer and BlueRobotics co-founder, Rustom Jehangir.

Applications for marine robotics vary from studying ocean currents and temperatures to photographing reefs and sea creatures to surveying underwater wreckage. With the Thruster-100, the goal is to inexpensively power more exploration like that. “We hope the thruster will serve as a foundation for which other people can build things,” explains Joe Spadola, co-founder at BlueRobotics.

As part of the Cool Idea! Award grant from Proto Labs, the company will receive a range of thermoplastic injection-moulded parts including nose, propeller, nozzle and tail cone components along with mounting brackets. BlueRobotics plans to make its Thruster-100 available to customers later this year.

“While hardware, software and information have become readily available to the rapidly expanding hobbyist robotic market, ocean exploration within that market has been limited in part by the cost and design of the thruster component. BlueRobotics has designed a product that will enable not only the hobbyist market, but the academic and commercial markets to

push the current limits of marine robotics,” says Proto Labs Founder and Chairman, Larry Lukis.

Launched in 2011, the Proto Labs Cool Idea! Award gives a total of \$250,000 in services each year to entrepreneurs developing new products in the United States and Europe. Unlike other product awards that recognise products after they’re in mass production and on store shelves, the Cool Idea! Award is meant to help innovative ideas come to life. For more information about the Cool Idea! Award and to apply, visit www.protolabs.co.uk/coolidea.

About Proto Labs

Proto Labs (NYSE: PRLB) is a leading online and technology-enabled quick-turn manufacturer of machined and moulded parts for prototyping and low-volume production. The company produces real metal, plastic and liquid silicone rubber parts in less than three weeks through its two services: Firstcut CNC Machining and Protomold Injection Moulding. Product designers and engineers worldwide can upload 3D CAD models online and receive interactive quotes with manufacturability analysis and pricing information within hours. Go to www.protolabs.co.uk for more information about Proto Labs and its service.

About BlueRobotics

BlueRobotics is a California-based team of mechanical engineers who are developing affordable technology and thruster hardware for robotic marine vehicles. For more information, visit <http://www.blue-robotics.com/>.

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