

Japanese scientists work to create lifelike robot, problems remain

BY GRACE EAGAN
Staff Writer/Photographer

Standing 62.2 inches tall and weighing 95 pounds, HRP-4C sounds like an ordinary model, but the similarities end at her pretty face. HRP-4C is, in fact, the most recent development in Japanese robotic technology.

Scientists claim that "she" will eventually be able to wear clothes and walk a catwalk; however, her rather bulky silver and black body and awkward, mechanical movement make these two tasks impossible right now.

HRP-4C was first unveiled at a photo opportunity in Tsukuba, Japan. True to supermodel form, she agreed to offer a "Hello, everyone" to reporters but then refused to cooperate in her own demonstration. Even though she is capable of many human facial expressions, HRP-4C only showed off her surprised look when asked to express happiness and anger. After about 15 minutes with reporters, the robot waddled back into her curtained enclosure.

While technological advancements like this robot are

astounding, scientists believe they still have a long way to go. Creators of HRP-4C explain their goal is to develop helpful robots to care for the elderly, to teach in school, and to lead exercise classes. Even so, the realization of this dream may be delayed until the means to fulfill it are available.

"Technologically, it hasn't reached that level," said Hirohisa Hirukawa, who is one of HRC-4C's creators. He further clarified that even in the case of HRC-4C, responses from the audience were less than glowing.

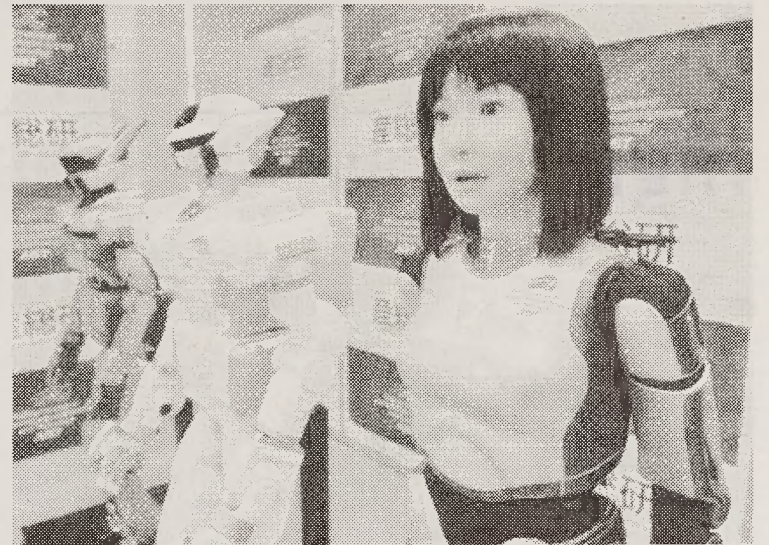
"Even as a fashion model, people in the industry told us she was short and had a rather ordinary figure," rather harsh words for any aspiring model, even a robot.

Regarding cases of HRP-4C's predecessors, technology was traded for looks. For example, Honda Motors's robot, Asimo, does not even try to emulate an authentic human visage. In fact, at first glance, it is slightly reminiscent of a friendly, less menacing Storm Trooper. There may be a human in there, but no one is really quite sure.

Another instance refers to Partner Ballroom Dance Robot, whose function is exactly as the name implies. This robot takes on a more human persona, but her three wheels and hot pink metal exterior are rather limiting. Therefore, HRP-4C has a leg up on the other competition by combining good looks and excellent functionality.

Motion plays a large role in imitating a human-like appearance, and to do so, scientists gave HRP-4C 38 motors that allow her to move and walk, with eight separate motors in her face alone that allows her to pout at reporters in her public debut. Though she was stubborn and refused to demonstrate her full range of "emotions," the public was impressed with the authenticity of her expressions. She blinks and even raises her eyebrows, which makes her look slightly like an animated character.

Questions continue to arise from critics whether the machine is capable of disobeying her operator's commands on purpose. Scientists doubt that it is a show of artificial intelligence, but instead it serves to demonstrate the high level of



HRP-4C is a Japanese designed robot made to look and act like a real human. Its technology could revolutionize the world of robotics. *Internet photo*

technology employed in such a unique robot.

Managers in the fashion industry shunned HRP-4C for her stiff, awkward movement, space suit-like body, and price (\$6,000 per model). Although she may not grace the fashion scenes in Paris, scientists have hope that HRP-4C may set an example for a whole new generation of robotics.

Eventually, robots may even replace flight attendants. While this concept may seem like a

viable threat to the humans currently holding these positions, scientists can assure anyone that technology, while it has advanced, will never replace humans.

For now, the world can be content to see robots like HRP-4C demonstrate how much science has accomplished. Maybe one day fashionistas can expect to see their favorite designer fashions under the lights with robots walking the catwalk

Aeropostale makes cuts to stay competitive

BY ANNA KANODE
Photographer

Aeropostale recently decided to close down its Jimmy'Z chain of eleven stores in favor of catering to a younger crowd.

In hopes of increasing their profits and customer base, they will open P.S. Aeropostale, which is slightly different from Jimmy'Z in the age range of its customers. The latter was a shoot off concept that Aeropostale developed in order to attempt

to gain a wider variety of unique customers.

Jimmy'Z carried merchandise with skulls and crosses in patterns that gave them a sharp edge, similar to fashions one might find in stores selling Gothic wear. Judging from this chain's lack of success, it appears as though the customers who typically bought Aeropostale apparel did not like the new line's style, and the shoppers who did appreciate the style did not want to buy

it from any store associated with Aeropostale.

Consequently, Aeropostale has been suffering, but according to reuters.com, the company still expects to gain about \$8 million dollars annually before tax payments once they discontinue the chain. Even with these fore mentioned losses, Aeropostale has enjoyed more success than competitors that have similar style and are in the same price range. They boast better sales than stores like

American Eagle. While Aeropostale's in-store revenue rose six percent, America Eagle's dropped 16 percent

Even with this gain, Aeropostale determined it must work even harder to maintain or surpass their profits. To do so, the strategy is to study its competition while still acknowledging the current state of the economy. By discontinuing the Jimmy'Z chain, Aeropostale has relieved some of their economic woes; however,

now the company must seek ways to beat their competitors; thus, the quick fix will be the new chain, P.S. Aeropostale.

While Jimmy'Z was appealing to some teenagers, P.S. Aeropostale will be directed at consumers whose ages range from seven to 12 years. By broadening the age range for its stores, Aeropostale hopes to gain more customers each year by assuming children who become comfortable having their mothers dressing

them in P.S. Aeropostale will eventually want to wear other Aeropostale clothes as they mature.

Although Aeropostale is not presently facing financial difficulties, the company does hold some doubts about the future in the current state of the economy. Time will tell whether or not these bold business decisions will pay off; however, this new chain of stores will either be Aeropostale's saving grace or its Achilles' heel.

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