

Innovation

Delivery Robot

Form and function

The suitcase-size, 25-pound Starship robot travels on sidewalks at up to 4 miles per hour to deliver as much as 20 pounds of groceries and other goods to a customer's door.

Innovator Ahti Heinla

Age 44

Co-founder and chief executive officer of Starship Technologies, a 45-person London startup



1.

Specs The six-wheeled electric vehicle uses a 3G or 4G Internet connection and mapping software to find its way from a retailer to customers who've placed orders via an app or a website.



Early tests Starship has tested its robots on sidewalks in 22 cities in the U.S. and Europe.

Origin Heinla, who co-founded Skype, learned to code from his mother while growing up in Estonia. He brought together the engineering team for Starship in July 2014.



Funding Heinla and co-founder Janus Friis, a fellow Skype alum, have invested a combined \$5 million in Starship.

2.

Deliveries The retailer loads up the Starship or sends it to a hub for packing, and the ordering app provides the customer with a confirmation code to open the robot when it arrives. Removing the goods and closing the lid starts the robot's return trip.



Customers Starship says it's targeting bakeries, groceries, couriers, and other businesses looking to deliver within a 10-square-mile area. (The robots can travel for more than two hours on a full charge.)



Next Steps

Driverless vehicles can make urban delivery more efficient, but large numbers of sidewalk robots pose their own problems, says Karl Ronn, managing director of consulting firm Innovation Portfolio Partners and former head of research and development at Procter & Gamble. Heinla says Starship is seeking additional funding while it further refines its robots for pilot programs in other cities. —Michael Belfiore