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Drone racing to buzz into Boston this spring

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A drone that took part in a racing competition last August in Berlin, Mass.

By Matt Rocheleau

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Ladies and gentlemen, start your tiny, whirring engines. Drone Day is coming to Boston.

At an all-day event this spring, drone enthusiasts plan to race competitively and host an array of

demonstrations that will aim to educate fellow users and the public about the hovering machines.

“It’s about all things drone,” said Sean Tierney, one of the lead organizers.

He said the event is “part of larger international effort to get people familiar with the technology and to get people to see that they’re not dangerous in the right hands, and get people to have fun.”

The increasing popularity of drones among both recreational and commercial users has not come without controversy. Various concerns have been raised, including about the devices flying too close to manned aircraft, crashing into people on the ground, or being used for snooping.



The latest tech sport taking the country by storm? Drone Racing.

Drone racing captivates fans at Harvard event

New circuit aims to be the NASCAR of drone racing

Video: Drone racing

Organizers said they hope to counter drone-related privacy and safety concerns by showing how the devices can be beneficial, assisting with emergency response, filmmaking, and inspecting infrastructure, among other things.

There will be racing, hardware demonstrations, vendor booths, virtual reality flight simulators,

education and safety sessions, and opportunities for users to register their devices with the Federal Aviation Administration, organizers said.

It will mark the second year for the event; the inaugural run was fairly small, drawing about 70 people. Tierney said he expected two to three times as many to attend this year.

What exactly will the drone racing look like?

Dave Shevett, founder and chairman of the US Drone Racing Association based in Berlin, Mass., explained that drone operators will wear either look at a video feed or wear goggles that give them a drone's-eye view of the action via a tiny camera affixed to the drone.

“It’s as if you’re sitting on the drone and flying,” he said.

The operators control the devices as they zip around a course, typically marked by gates through which the operators navigate the drones.

Shevett said some high-end drones can travel faster than 60 miles per hour, but most models max out between 35 and 40 miles per hour.

Like car racing, there are crashes, Shevett explained. In most cases, he said, the drones don’t collide with each other, but crash into the gates.

Tierney described it as similar to NASCAR, but in mid-air.

The event is scheduled from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. May 7, at the Innovation and Design Building in South Boston.

Tierney said there’s about 12,000 square feet of space for the event and the building’s owner donated the space. Safety netting will be installed around the drone race course.

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