

A Quasar Ride to Automate 2015

Bill Walton and robots – what more do you need?

Erik Schmidt, Assistant Editor

Bill Walton – a 7 foot tall anomaly from the annals of basketball history who wears tie-dye shirts, listens to the Grateful Dead and, according to his own outlandish proclamations, hasn't taken an indoor shower in 35 years – is well-known for looking at average accomplishments and being overcome with extreme fits of emotion.

Over the course of his long, strange journey as a broadcaster, the peculiar former Portland Trail Blazers star has drawn comparisons between NBA players and the Age of Romanticism, Sir Isaac Newton and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 in E-flat.

As you may have gathered, hyperbole is Walton's native tongue. In the world of professional sports, it falls on deaf ears, mostly.

Now, Walton, odd as it may seem, will be a special guest during the Automate 2015 show that takes place from March 23-26 at McCormick Place in Chicago, IL.

Sure, at face value this pairing is about as logical as one of Walton's infamous sound bites ("Vladimir Radmanovic, this guy is cut from stone! It's as if Michelangelo were reading and a lightning bolt flashed before him!").

But here's where it starts to make some sense:

Surrounded by groundbreaking technology and innovative, world-leading visioneers, amidst 75,000 square feet of robotic and automation glory that will literally help shape the world of tomorrow and the decades that follow, Walton's rampant poetic musings finally won't feel so out of place.

So join Walton, hitch a ride on a quasar and take it all the way to the top of the mountain to the Promised Land.

This is Automate 2015.



The Show

One oversized Deadhead with a mean midrange jumper and a penchant for referencing the legends of antiquity? Check.

But what else can attendees expect at Automate 2015? Everything and the (automated) kitchen sink.

"We consider [Automate] the broadest automation solution show in North America," said Bob Doyle, director of communications for the Association for Advancing Automation. "We have robots, machine vision technologies, motion control, and a whole integrator section at the front of the show with a bunch of exhibitors showing off a whole bunch of innovative solutions."

The show now known as Automate began in 1977 when it was called the International Robots, Vision & Motion Control Show, which was a smaller, quainter version of the massive biennial robot-palooza that has hit the Windy City every two years since 2011.

"It's definitely broader now and much larger," Doyle said.

Much larger – yeah, in the same way that the Kraken is *much larger* than the breaded calamari rings at an Italian restaurant.

The show, according to Doyle, is going to be about 50 percent bigger in

both size and scope than the comparatively puny 2013 version. He's expecting roughly 300 exhibitors and 15,000 attendees.

"We're geared towards many, many different industries, but any manufacturer who is looking for a way to better their product through use of automation in some way will find a solution at our show," Doyle said.

Really, that's what Automate's purpose is at a subatomic level: solving problems. The show in and of itself is an entertaining circus of cutting-edge automated technology and an absolute utopia for small business owners and giant corporations alike. And while there will undoubtedly be many fun things to view on the show floor – a robot that puts together puzzles with pinpoint accuracy, anyone? – the real purpose of Automate is not to dazzle, but to progress.

Accompanying the show is a comprehensive educational conference featuring a broad array of classes from beginner to advanced skill levels. Classes are taught by experienced industry professionals who understand the challenges attendees face, according to Doyle.

"The show is free while the conference obviously has a cost," he said. "But

if anyone wants to learn more about robotics, vision or motion control, we have a whole conference that you can register for, either day by day or the whole week. If you go to our website (www.automateshow.com) you can see the full lineup and conference agenda.

"Also, as a part of that, we're hosting the International Symposium on Robotics, which is an international event that hasn't been in the United States in several years. That will be pretty cool.

"One other thing of note on the show floor is what we call 'expert huddles.' This is an opportunity for attendees to talk with an expert in the field about a topic in a smaller setting of 10 or 12 people. It's not a PowerPoint presentation or anything like that – it's actually a conversation about solutions that are provided in the automation space."

Keynote speakers for the three-day show will be Rene Noemi (March 23), the director of Android and Chrome Global Business, John Mackey (March 24), cofounder and CEO of Whole Foods Market, and, perhaps most no-

table, Steve Wozniak (March 25), co-founder of Apple.

Then, of course, there's Walton, who will be in attendance on March 24 for the Automate Madness Networking Party.

"We're calling it Automate Madness because the March Madness NCAA Tournament is around the same time," Doyle said. "After 5 p.m. we're having a basketball-themed event with food and drinks and [Walton] will be making his appearance."

Add it all up.

As Walton would surely say: Automate is primed to be the best show in the history of Western civilization.

The Robots

In all seriousness, though, that's quite enough about Walton. Though he figures to be one of the more popular attractions during the course of the week (and the tallest), the show isn't about him.

It's about the robots.

"For us, Automate is a robotic specific tradeshow, really," said Alex Miller,

ABB Robotics sales manager. "I know there are other aspects of automation that are there, but it's put on in conjunction with the Robotic Industries Association. It is probably the only robotic specific tradeshow we go to."

"We will show a wider range of our robotic technology at Automate than we would at any other show."

Attendees can expect to see the full spectrum of robotic and automation technology on display at Automate: big and small, complicated and simple, dangerous and friendly, blue, yellow, white and orange.

And out of all the hundreds of robots expected to be featured at the show, there may be one type in particular that stands out head and shoulders – err, nuts and bolts – above the rest.

"Collaborative robots are a very hot topic right now in the industry," Doyle said. "Basically, a collaborative robot is a robot that can work side-by-side with people. When you think of a traditional robot it's behind a cage. A collaborative robot is unique in that it's safer to work right next to and is much more nimble."



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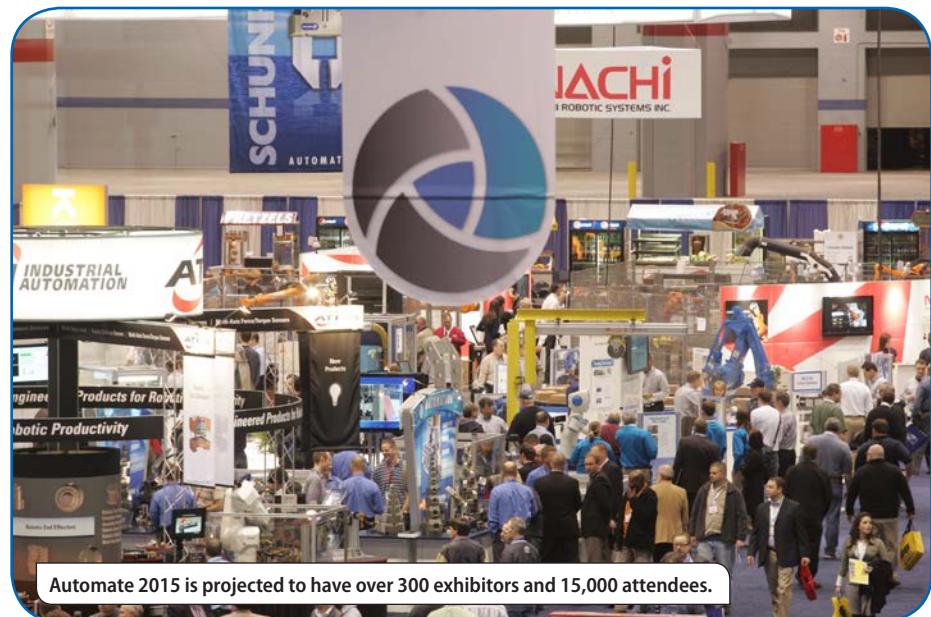
"I know several exhibitors will be there with their collaborative robots and suppliers will be introducing some new products, which I think is going to be pretty exciting."

ABB (Auburn Hills, MI), one of the world's leading suppliers of industrial robots and modular manufacturing systems, will not be showcasing any collaborative robots at Automate, but they do have several exciting things planned for the eight robots they're bringing, according to Miller.

"There's kind of a theme to what we're bringing," he said. "That theme is centered on how robots are becoming more efficient. Robots are lighter, they take up less space, they're easier to operate - that efficiency is essential."

The newest model that ABB will have on display is the IRB 1200, a compact, flexible, fast and functional small industrial robot that was released in the fall of 2014.

"It's ideal for assembly and material handling, etcetera," Miller said. "That's on the small end. On the larger end we have the IRB 6700, and then we have



some other demos as well. We have our IRB 360 FlexPicker and we have another small robot at 120."

Arguably the most fascinating presentation for ABB will be its FlexPicker, a high speed picking and packing robot with a reach of 1,600 mm and a mid-range payload of up to 6 kg. The

FlexPicker's most famous application - one that dessert aficionados will be most disappointed to find is not going to be on display at Automate - is putting the tops on Pepperidge Farm Milano cookies.

"We're going to be showing some high speed picking and placing," Miller



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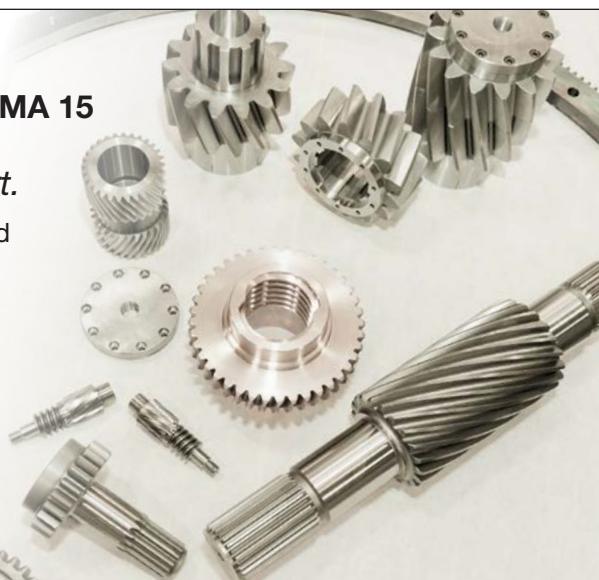
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said. "It's not going to be Milano cookies - I'm not actually sure what the little product will be - but they'll be randomly displaced on the conveyor and the robot, with its vision, will be able to pick it and place it on a conveyor very quickly."

Yaskawa Motoman, a robotic automation supplier out of West Carrollton, OH that began its involvement with Automate back in 1989 under its previous name and direction, will have one of the largest booths at the show.

"In 2015 Yaskawa Electric Corporation will be celebrating their 100th anniversary," said Tim DeRosett, director of strategic initiatives at Yaskawa Motoman. "We will be featuring a range of robots, controls and motion products. We will also have some very exciting demonstrations focusing on healthcare."

"While there are certainly larger shows that focus on specific vertical markets, Automate crosses all segments with solutions that help companies solve their production needs. There is a lot of energy around production robots for general industry."

"It's a great time to be in automation."

The Exhibitors

While attendees' eyes will be focused on the robots - and really, who can blame them? - the eyes of the exhibitors at Automate will be looking at each other.

"The most unique aspect of it, compared to other trade shows we go to, is that Automate is all automation companies next to each other," Miller said. "We'll see competitors right across the aisle from us. When we go to other trade shows, our competitors are dispersed all throughout the hall."

"One of the most distinguishing features is that you can see all your competitors in one place and they're all within 50 yards of you."

With the number of exhibitors at 267 less than two months away from the show, the grand total could potentially reach in excess of 300, according to Doyle.

Three hundred companies, some robotic and automation suppliers like ABB and Yaskawa and Fanuc, others eager buyers like Atlanta Drive Systems, Inc., Boca Bearing Company,

Diequa Corporation, Harmonic Drive LLC and Igus Inc., all within a six-axis robot's reach.

It's the very definition of "keep your friends close, but keep your enemies closer."

And it's what makes Automate such a distinct event.

"Everything is *right there* in the robotic industry," Miller said. "You can see what every robot manufacturer has to offer. And that is invaluable."

Bill Walton couldn't have said it better himself. **PTE**

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