

# Suzuki and Hukato plan trip to the moon

The next vehicle to drive on the moon could very well be a Suzuki, if the team from Hukato, Suzuki and ispace technologies has its way.



Preliminary model of the Suzuki lunar craft.

Hukato is competing for Google's [Lunar XPRIZE](#), often called Moon 2.0, and it aims to be the first privately funded lunar exploration team. It has received a significant boost this month as Suzuki announced its support of this all-Japanese team. The Lunar XPRIZE of \$20 million will be awarded to the first privately funded team of space explorers that can safely land a lunar rover on the surface of the moon and have the vehicle travel at least 500 metres, while recording high resolution images.

The deadline for this feat is 31 December 2017, although teams must have booked a space flight before the end of 2016 to remain in contention.

For the trip to the moon, Hukato has enlisted the support of ispace technologies, a high-tech startup that develops interconnected micro-robots that will one day explore space for exploitable resources. Once on the moon, however, the task will fall on Suzuki to help design and build a craft that can manoeuvre the rocky and powdery surface in one sixth of the gravity of the earth.

## Sharing expertise

According to Hukato, they enlisted the help of Suzuki because of its globally recognised expertise in building highly manoeuvrable compact vehicles, often with four-wheel drive. Suzuki, in turn, was enthused by the Hukato's bold vision and the opportunity to contribute to the future of society, as it has done since its inception 107 years ago.

Suzuki has already started working with Hukato on weight-saving and drivability. Weight-saving will be crucial for the launch and transport phase and is seen as the primary concern for keeping the cost of the launch as low as possible. Here Suzuki has contributed its knowledge of weight-saving design and the use of modern materials, such as carbon fibre. To aid the rover's drivability on the powdery surface of the moon, called regolith, Suzuki will utilise its knowledge of traction control and four-wheel-drive and its ability to build these technologies into very compact vehicles.

Hukato's current rover design is called the Pre-Flight Model 3 and it features solar panels for energy, high-definition 360 degree cameras, a full carbon-fibre hull and custom-designed wheels designed for grip.

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