

Press release

Where technology brings people together

Cyathlon 2020: More than just a competition

Zurich, 6 February 2020

On 2 - 3 May 2020, Zurich opens its doors for the second Cyathlon. In this unique championship, individuals with a disability, assisted by cutting-edge technology, come to terms with the challenges of everyday life. Over 90 teams from around the world are battling it out in six disciplines. Swiss radio and television will broadcast the race finals across the nation.

Widespread interest sparked by the premiere in 2016 (over 4,500 spectators and some 150 media representatives from around the world) called for this year's Cyathlon to run over two days. Lining up in May are over 90 international teams – a third more than last time. What unites them is a mission to push technical assistive devices to the next level, so that people with disabilities can participate more fully in society.

“Despite striking advances in assistive technology in recent decades, only a few devices are suitable for everyday use today”, explains Robert Riener, Professor of Sensorimotor Systems at ETH Zurich and Initiator of the Cyathlon. “The goal here is to create not the most complex devices, but the most useful ones”.

Six disciplines with fresh challenges

The Cyathlon challenges are geared to everyday activities that many people with disabilities find hard to master. Tying shoelaces, negotiating uneven terrain, opening a bottle, sitting down and getting up again – these are just some of the tasks that competitors in the 2020 event must tackle. On the programme again are the six disciplines – the Brain-Computer Interface Race, Functional Electrical Stimulation Bike Race, Powered Arm Prosthesis Race, Powered Leg Prosthesis Race, Powered Exoskeleton Race and Powered Wheelchair Race – but since 2016 these have been fine-tuned, with input from the users of assistive devices.

The Bike Race, for example, calls for even more efficiency, as the distance to be covered in a set time has been increased. The new Haptic Box task requires Cyathlon pilots with arm prostheses to identify objects only by touch. Meanwhile, competitors in the Powered Wheelchair Race must now exercise precise control of a technical device, such as a robotic arm, for opening and closing a door.

More than 90 teams from some 30 countries

For months now, over 90 teams from all six continents have been getting set for the event – with universities, industry, NGOs and people with disabilities working closely together on a variety of innovative solutions. This year, the United Kingdom is represented by as many as ten teams; one of these is the team from Imperial College in London, who have created a semi-autonomous wheelchair steered by eye movements. Six teams from the USA are taking part, including Team Cleveland, the 2016 gold medal winner in the Functional Electrical Stimulation Bike Race. Asia is represented by over 20 teams. Touch Hand from South Africa is the only team from the African continent this year; the team will compete in the Powered Arm Prosthesis Race.

“The participation of teams from all over the world shows that the Cybathlon has become an event with a global reach. The Cybathlon promotes international cooperation and playful competition in a highly socially relevant area,” says Joël Mesot, President of ETH Zurich.

Strong Swiss presence

Switzerland is represented in all six disciplines, with 11 teams in total. Four of these teams are from the ETH Zurich domain: ETH spin-off [Scewo](#) is competing in the Powered Wheelchair Race, while [Varileg Enhanced](#) is putting to the test an exoskeleton developed together with the University of Applied Sciences Rapperswil (HSR). Two ETH Zurich research teams will also be in the line-up – one for the Powered Leg Prosthesis Race, and the other for the Brain-Computer Interface Race, in a joint endeavour with Nanyang University of Technology, Singapore.

The Cybathlon is made possible by the generous support of various [partners](#).

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Cyathlon 2020 for the Media

Cyathlon 2020 media accreditation is now open! Please sign up [online](#) to register for the 2020 event in the SWISS Arena in Kloten, near Zurich. Due to the great demand, registrations will be checked and confirmed individually.

You'll find the competition programme and more about the Cyathlon, teams and disciplines [online](#). A selection of photos and videos from Cyathlon 2016 are available at the following [link](#).

Follow the Cyathlon on social media; take part in the discussion under the hashtag #CYBATH-LON2020.