

Sony's robot adds jogging to talent list

By **YURI KAGEYAMA**
The Associated Press

TOKYO — Sony Corp.'s walking robot already knows a few hip dance steps and can kick a miniature soccer ball. Now, it can jog — a new trick that developers say is ingenious because it requires the machine to jump off the ground, even if for just a fraction of a second.

The new skills of the humanoid, developed by the Japanese electronics and entertainment giant's robot unit that makes the dog-like Aibo, were demonstrated to reporters at a Tokyo hall in December.

When an upgrade of the 23-inch-tall robot was introduced last year, Sony executive Toshitada Doi had said it might go on sale for the price of an expensive car. But now Sony has no plans to sell Qrio, which is short for "quest for curiosity."

Instead, the machine is being billed as an amusing "corporate ambassador" that can highlight Sony's innovativeness. Sony would not say how much it has cost.

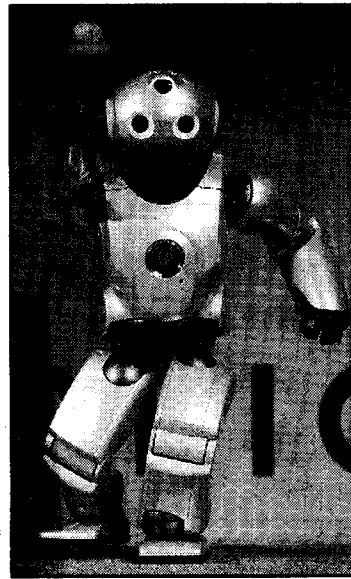
In the latest demonstration, the bubble-headed, glowing-eyed robot jiggled and made mechanical jangling sounds as it moved forward on a table, bounced jerkily sideways and pivoted in a turn. It started with a slow walk, moved into an easy jog, stopped, then turned and began jogging again.

While running robots are not altogether new, Sony engineers said their robot was a technical achievement because it smoothly simulated running. The breakthrough required sophisticated features in the robot's joints and a beefy central processing unit to keep Qrio's balance and manage delicate maneuvers.

Don't expect Qrio to enter any track meets just yet. It can move only at 46 feet per minute (roughly 0.5 mph), but that's more than twice as fast as its previous walk.

"He still lacks control," said Yoshihiro Kuroki, a Sony general manager. "But we're working on it."

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Itsuo Inouye/The Associated Press

AND THE PITCH: Sony Corp.'s humanoid robot Qrio demonstrates a baseball pitch at a news conference in Tokyo. The 23-inch-tall child-shaped robot — which already knows a few hip dances and can kick a miniature soccer ball — threw balls, shaking its head to signs from an imaginary catcher initially and then nodding in determination, to demonstrate that its metal hands can grasp and release objects.