

Meet “Digit”, the walking robot for Ford self-driving vans

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Ford Motor Co said on Wednesday it was partnering with walking robots maker Agility Robotics as it designs a planned fleet of self-driving delivery vans that will drop packages at the doorsteps of people’s homes.

The United States’ second largest carmaker has been moving steadily on the development of full-service autonomous driving vans which it could potentially license out to companies ranging from Domino’s Pizza to Lyft or Target.

It launched a self-driving pilot with delivery partners including Domino’s in Miami last year, and it said it was working on the best way to integrate Agility’s two-legged robot, Digit, into future vans.

Digit is capable of lifting packages that weigh up to 40 pounds, can walk up and down stairs and through uneven terrain, while maintaining its balance after being bumped, Ford said.

“It’s not always convenient for people to leave their homes to retrieve deliveries,” Ken Washington, Ford’s chief technology officer, said.

“If we can free people up to focus less on the logistics of making deliveries, they can turn their time and effort to things that really need their attention.”

After Ford bought Argo AI, a Pittsburgh-based self-driving startup in 2017, the company has taken aim at providing autonomous vehicle service to multiple partners, who in turn would offer it to their customers under their own brand names.

A Lyft customer, for instance, could schedule a ride from a Lyft mobile phone app in a Ford self-driving vehicle.

But with spiraling development costs for autonomous cars in recent years, the company and other carmakers have sought alliances and outside investors.

Ford has been in talks with Germany’s Volkswagen AG for an investment in the Argo unit, potentially saving billions in development costs.

(Reuters)