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Robot depending on kindness of strangers meets its demise in Philadelphia

HitchBOT interacted with humans through speech, tested "whether robots could trust" us.

by **Nathan Mattise** - Aug 2, 2015 10:00pm CEST

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HitchBOT during happier times in Boston. [HitchBOT on Instagram](#)

On July 17, a smiling and seemingly harmless robot named **HitchBOT** set out to accomplish its dream—roadtripping across America through the kindness of strangers. The little fellow comes from a Canadian research team made up of students and professors at McMaster, Ryerson, and the University of Toronto, and in 2014 it managed to make a [similar trek across Canada](#) and parts of Europe. The whole goal, according to the team, was simple: "to see whether robots could trust humans."

Tragically, about two weeks later, little HitchBOT learned a rough life lesson. According to the Associated Press, the bot met its demise in Philadelphia, home of sports fans who notoriously have [thrown batteries at opposing players or snowballs at Santa Claus](#). At the time of this article, the specifics of what happened to HitchBOT remain unknown. Its creators are attempting to investigate, and HitchBOT's official site states details should be made available on [August 5](#).

"The creators were sent an image of the vandalized robot Saturday but cannot track its location because the battery is dead," the [Associated Press](#) reported. "They said they don't know who destroyed it or why. But co-creator Frauke Zeller said many children who adored the robot are now heartbroken."

[Buzzfeed Canada](#) spoke to HitchBOT's creators, Zeller and David Harris Smith, to confirm an image going around of the fallen robot, depicting HitchBOT [strewn out in the streets with limbs detached](#) (*warning: image may be graphic if you're unsettled by the sight of robot violence*). "We decided not to publish it," Zeller told BuzzFeed. "It's upsetting—you can see how it has been taken apart and left in the street."

HitchBOT started its journey in Massachusetts and it traversed through Boston, Salem, Gloucester, Marblehead, parts of Rhode Island, and New York City. Its untimely end means it will never reach its destination—San Francisco's [Exploratorium](#). According to the [trip's press release](#) [PDF], the bot couldn't move on its own but it did interact with humans utilizing [Cleverscript](#) speech technology (yes, the same stuff that has [attempted to top the Turing Test](#). Hence why HitchBOT listed "trivia" as a hobby in its [about me](#)). The robot was three feet tall and weighed about 25 pounds (so it took *some* effort to pick up), and it came equipped with its interaction tech (camera vision, a microphone, and a speaker system), 3G and GPS capabilities, and an external battery meter (so it could juice up in [cigarette lighters or outlets](#)).

HitchBOT had a [bucket list](#) for its American journey, including things like seeing Times Square or simply "VEGAS!" On Friday July 24, the bot managed to find hosts with decent tickets at Fenway Park for the [Red Sox versus the Detroit Tigers](#). If you ever make it back to the states and down to New Orleans, HitchBOT, consider this an offer to make good on that dream of local jazz.

HitchBOT represented the most high-profile attempt by a robot to hitchhike across the US to date. In contrast, humans have attempted this feat countless times and [occasionally succeed](#) without encountering robot violence.

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Nathan Mattise / Nathan is a New Orleans-based Staff Editor at Ars Technica. He edits feature reports and contributes posts on a variety of topics like [lost short films](#) that ran before *Empire* and [why Apple no longer loves indie bands](#). [@nathanmattise on Twitter](#)

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