

Clones, noseprints, flying taxis: Sci-fi meets reality at expo

March 2 2023, by Valentin BONTEMPS and Joseph Boyle



'Since the 1940s we've known that dogs' noses worked a little like fingerprints,' said Petnow's Peter Jung.

The Mobile World Congress (MWC) is primarily a pow-wow for the big-wigs of the telecom industry, but far from the main thoroughfares of the

vast conference there are always hidden tech gems.

Here are some of the most offbeat products spotted by AFP.

Eternal clone

As advertising slogans go, "you can live forever" is up there with the best.

That is how Memori Yamato explains the "personalised AI clone" from her Japanese company Alt Inc.

"Your descendants can continue to speak and interact with you, even after your death," Yamato told AFP.

The idea is to upload as many videos, images and audio samples as you can while alive.

The system will use it to generate an AI mirror, cloning you forever in the [digital world](#).

"It will look like you, it speaks in your voice, and it even thinks like you," she said.

The idea has been nine years in the making, she said, and feedback from early users suggests the technology has nailed appearances and voices.

Noseprint ID

A dog's nose carries similar identifying traits as a human fingerprint.

South Korean start-up Petnow took this info and ran with it—like a dog

after a stick—to create a biometric database of pets based on noseprints rather than microchips.

"Since the 1940s, we've known that dogs' noses worked a little like fingerprints," the firm's Peter Jung told AFP.

He explained that around 100,000 animals are abandoned each year in South Korea, often because owners cannot afford vet bills.

"Less than 10 percent have chips because people don't like the process," he said.

Petnow just requires a photo and AI does the rest, ensuring the photos are good enough for identity purposes.

Jung says 50,000 pet owners have signed up since last year and he hopes the government will change the rules to allow his system to replace chips.

And cat lovers need not worry. Their noses may be too petite to be identifiable, but each feline face is unique and can be used in the system.

Flying taxi

A staple from the pages of science-fiction and the dream of the super-rich, flying taxis could be with us as soon as 2025, according to SK Telecom.

At the MWC, some attendees got an early taste, thanks to VR headsets and a real-life prototype complete with juddering seats.

Halfway between a helicopter and a drone, the craft has six electric motors that allow vertical take-offs and landings.

It can carry up to four passengers and move at speeds of up to 320 kilometres (198 miles) per hour.

South Korea's biggest telecoms provider developed it with Californian start-up Joby Aviation and hopes it will solve congestion in South Korea's cities without costing the earth.

"In Korea, in urban areas, we have severe traffic congestion, but constructing a mass transportation system like a highway or subway needs many social costs," said the firm's Ken Wohn.

"Using this UAM (Urban Air Mobility) service can shorten our customers' travel time without making so much infrastructure."

Never alone

In the future, we may live our later years in the company of "socially intelligent" robots capable of "building an emotional relationship" with us.

That is the vision of Spanish technology outfit Eurecat, which has developed a robot called NHOA—or "never home alone".

It is designed to reduce the loneliness of older people living at home.

The orange and white robot stands 160 cm tall and can be controlled with a touchscreen and by voice.

Eurecat's David Mari said the aim was not to replace human relationships but to "humanise" the applications and connected objects used by older people.

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