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Proto Labs Chooses Innovative RoughRider® Wheelchair as Latest Cool Idea!

Award makes wheelchair available to people in U.S. for the first time

MAPLE PLAIN, Minn. – Nov. 29, 2011 – Active wheelchair users will be excited to learn that [Proto Labs](#) has chosen [Whirlwind Wheelchair International](#) as the latest recipient of its Cool Idea! Award. Proto Labs – the leading online and technology-enabled manufacturer of quick-turn prototype and short-run parts – will help the company launch its innovative [RoughRider wheelchair](#) to the U.S. market.

The RoughRider was originally designed for those with disabilities in developing countries as a low-cost, highly durable wheelchair that can handle rough terrain with ease. The RoughRider combines a revolutionary long wheelbase with a unique, high-impact/high-flotation wheel to allow users to safely descend curbs and short flights of stairs and to easily traverse obstacles in their path.

Proto Labs identified the RoughRider, now in use in more than 40 countries, as a good candidate for the Cool Idea! Award amid growing U.S. demand for the product. U.S. riders seeking a more active lifestyle value the chair's performance and rugged durability, and began asking when it would be available. In preparation for the release to a mainstream U.S. audience, the RoughRider underwent a redesign with the addition of lightweight side panels to make it better looking and customizable, something U.S. customers will love. As a Cool Idea! Award recipient, Proto Labs provided Whirlwind Wheelchair International with the key side panels needed for an initial U.S. launch.

"We wanted to recognize Whirlwind Wheelchair International's response to the demand for their product outside of the developing countries they had been serving. They were able to improve upon the existing model to accommodate wheelchair riders in the U.S. who are accustomed to the luxury of high-end chairs, while still keeping the design that allows for off-road experiences intact," said Proto Labs Founder and CTO Larry Lukis. "The RoughRider is a great example of trickle-up innovation and something that perfectly fits the innovative spirit of the Cool Idea! Award."

"Scores of wheelchair riders in the U.S. have inquired about purchasing the RoughRider specifically for off-pavement adventures that are difficult with U.S. style wheelchairs," said Whirlwind Wheelchair Founder Ralf Hotchkiss. "Entering the U.S. market at this time will provide Whirlwind with a wealth of critical feedback from well-informed consumers, and may raise enough funds to do much-needed development of the innovations coming in from riders in developing countries. Besides, some U.S. riders who have ridden the Rough Rider had so much fun that they would love to get one for themselves. We will do whatever is necessary to make this happen."

The RoughRider wheelchair has received critical support, both from within the wheelchair riding community, and from [former President Bill Clinton at a Walkabout Foundation Benefit](#).

The [Cool Idea! Award](#) is a new program offered by Proto Labs that gives product designers the opportunity to bring innovative products to life. Whirlwind Wheelchair International is the third recipient, with additional award winners to be named. During 2011, Proto Labs will provide an aggregate of up to \$100,000 worth of prototyping and short-run production services to award recipients. For more information, visit www.protolabs.com/coolidea.

About Proto Labs

Proto Labs is a leading online and technology-enabled quick-turn manufacturer of low-volume CNC-machined and injection molded custom parts for prototyping and short-run production. The company provides “Real Parts, Really Fast” to product developers worldwide and has two quick-turn services in North America, Europe and Japan: Firstcut (www.firstcut.com) and CNC machining and Protomold (www.protomold.com) injection molding. Both are capable of providing parts in as fast as one business day. Product developers who use Proto Labs for prototypes and short-run production can upload a 3D CAD file at any one of Proto Labs online sites, get an interactive quotation and place an order for Proto Labs services directly online. For more information, visit: www.protolabs.com.

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