

Foolish Humans Antagonize New Vineyard Robot with Tests of Extreme Temperature and Terrain, For Now

Last time Unfiltered checked in on the robots, the **Terminator** [was lunching at Cheval-Blanc back in June](#). The rise of the machines has continued unabated in the time since: The latest development in wine A.I. goes by the innocuous name **VineScout**, and this guy, about the size of an extra-large bumper car, rolls through vineyards taking measurements on vine vitals like water availability, leaf and canopy temperature, and plant vigor. There's no remote control involved; VineScout uses GPS and motion sensors to navigate the rows of vines.



VineScout is made to perform tricks for its human "friends."

VineScout

A project of the Agricultural Robotics Lab (ARL) at the Polytechnic University of Valencia in Spain, in conjunction with Portugal's Symington Family Estates, the company behind [the Wall-Ye pruning bot](#), and a few other partners, VineScout is on track to go commercial in 2019, but that goal is not without challenges. "They have to be reliable, robust, and easy to use by the non-ICT [information and communications technology] expert," ARL's **Francisco Rovira-Más** told Unfiltered via email.

Aside from managing uneven terrain, the robots also need to be affordable to the average wine farmer, Rovira-Más said—he's hoping for a basic model to come in at around \$12,000 to \$15,000. And of course, there's the "human" resources issue: Will vineyard workers resent their new robot overlords?

"People need to understand that the robot is not replacing workers but making their life easier, that is, robots will do the part of the job nobody wants to do because it is physically demanding and unhealthy," said Rovira-Más, citing trials over the summer in the Douro. "In June we reached temperatures above 104° F many days, resulting in a leaking battery and overheated electronics. This is not the right environment to have workers taking data ... but this data will be key for the production of premier wines."

Symington managing director **Rupert Symington** is one human who's already on board. "As you can imagine, we are extremely excited to be part of a well-advanced scientific project to bring technological innovation to bear in traditional vineyard management, something that we believe needs to happen for our business ... to remain sustainable," he told Unfiltered in an email. VineScout will be back in Symington's vineyards for the 2018 season; for now, it silently plots and waits.