

Moulin Rouge dancers perform during the celebration of the 130th anniversary of the French oldest cabaret in Paris. — AFP photos

Moulin Rouge dancers take it to the street for 130th birthday

Thousands of people massed outside the Moulin Rouge cabaret on Sunday night for a fireworks and French can-can extravaganza to mark the 130th anniversary of the storied Montmartre institution. Police blocked off the boulevard for the event, which began with music and a light show projected onto the iconic red windmill, recounting the venue's Belle Epoque origins. A sole dancer then appeared on the roof, braving the autumn chill in one of the cabaret's skimpy sequined costumes—though she was not topless, presumably a nod to the families in the crowd.

Then, as fireworks boomed overhead—red, naturally, later mixed with whites and blues—around 50 long-legged dancers wearing the same colors emerged to perform their

famous can-can. Yiftah Bar-Akiva, an Israeli who has lived in Paris for 11 years, was sipping champagne from a flute glass with friends who came for the party. "It's as mythical as the Eiffel Tower, it's like a piece of history of the Belle Epoque," he said. "I don't think it's disrespectful of women, I think it's still art," he added. "It's not like it's a peepshow!"

Joanna Cavarzan travelled from her home near the city of Chartres, not far from Paris, with a friend, Joe McGinty, who was visiting from Toronto. "I've never been inside, and I was hoping to see a little bit what it was like," Cavarzan said. But like many in the crowd, she could hardly see the dancers—no stage had been set up on the boulevard for their show.

Opened in 1889 — the same year as the Eiffel Tower was completed—the Moulin Rouge has become a must-see for millions of tourists to the French capital, even if only from the outside.

The two nightly shows, two hours each, are almost always sold out seven nights a week, 365 nights a year, with tourists and locals attending in roughly even numbers. The cabaret has also become a touchstone in popular culture, not only with Baz Luhrmann's 2001 hit film but before that in 1952 with John Huston's version starring Zsa Zsa Gabor.—AFP

Vietnamese roll out Transformers inspired robot with green message

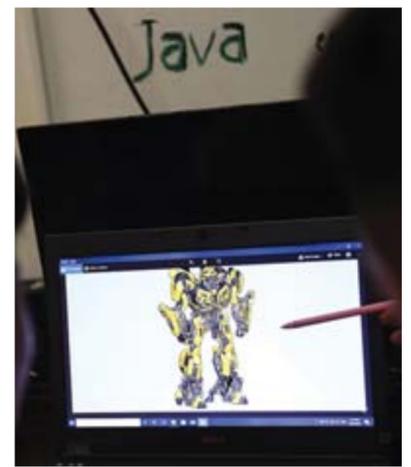
There is more than meets the eye to the towering robot resembling a character from the "Transformers" movie franchise—it speaks Vietnamese and is made from spare motorbike parts. "Hello everyone ... I am from Vietnam," the hulking Robot One says as it swivels side to side in a Hanoi workshop. A team of IT programmers and students say they want to provoke debate about the scourge of discarded and unused autoparts in a city where nearly six million motorbikes hit the streets daily.

Hanoi officials vowed in 2017 to ban motorbikes from roads by 2030 to ease pollution and congestion woes. "Our team made this robot in order to send a message to everybody—let's protect the environment," said newly-graduated engineer Do Danh Phong, a member of the informal Robot Bank group. Inspired by the feuding robots in director Michael Bay's multibillion dollar "Transformers" franchise, Robot One was cobbled together from the remnants of Japanese Honda and Taiwanese SYM motorbikes.

The 100-kilogram and three-meter high Robot One is controlled by a PlayStation joystick, can make simple moves and utter some basic phrases. Its creators had to scour shops to pull together the right selection of parts to give it the same muscular frame as the robots in the movie. Robot One is the first of many, the team says, with dreams of creating a robot park in the capital one day.—AFP



This photograph shows 'Robot-One,' made from spare motorcycle parts, at a workshop in Hanoi. — AFP photos



Mexican church blesses furry friends for World Animal Day



Chihuahuas, parakeets and turtles joined their human companions for services at a Catholic church Friday in the Mexican city of Zapopan, where they got a special blessing for World Animal Day. Pets joined their owners in the pews of the city's Saint Francis of Assisi church, named for the patron saint of animals, whose feast day is October 4.

Parishioners in the western city could be seen praying with their birds perched on their shoulders, sitting next to plastic receptacles holding their turtles or taking their communion wafers as their dogs keenly watched. Lucia Rincon, who attended the mass with her German shepherd, said she and her brother try to bring him every year. "We're big believers in Saint Francis, and we know animals need a guide, too. And what better blessing than that of Saint Francis?" Rincon, 36, told AFP.

Standing in the church's door, priest Juan Jose Leal blessed the animals, then sprinkled them with holy water as the owners each named their pets: "Daisy," "Cinnamon," "Cucho." "They are part of our lives, part of our homes. May we love them and care for them, and may God help us be responsible in caring for these little animals," said Leal. Launched in 1925 by German writer, publisher and pet enthusiast Heinrich Zimmermann, World Animal Day seeks to raise awareness about animal welfare and protection.—AFP

Catholic faithfuls bring their pets to be blessed at the Church of Saint Francis of Assisi, patron saint of animals, whose feast marks World Animal Day in Zapopan, Jalisco state in Mexico. — AFP photos

