The winner of Industrial Truck of the Year is a robot

A Danish robotics startup has won the IFOY AWARD 2026 with a self-driving pallet jack built around a simple idea: robots should not replace warehouse operators, they should give them back time, energy and control.

Stuttgart, Baden-Wurttemberg Jun 29, 2026 (Issuewire.com**)** - In most warehouses, the hardest work is not always the heaviest lift. Sometimes it is the walk.

The same route again and again. From receiving to storage. From storage to production. From production to shipping. A pallet is picked up, moved, dropped off, and then the operator walks back to do it all over again. It is the kind of work that keeps the world moving, but also quietly drains the people doing it.

For decades, warehouse automation has promised to change that. But for many companies, the promise came with a catch: large projects, fixed systems, complex integrations and robots that asked the warehouse to adapt to them.

The Mobile Robot Company was founded on a different belief. The next paradigm in robotics automation is not about removing people from the process. It is about designing robots that work with people, on their terms.

That belief has now been recognized internationally. At the IFOY AWARD 2026 in Stuttgart, The Mobile Robot Company won the Industrial Truck of the Year category for the J1600, a self-driving pallet jack that can be used manually when people need control and autonomously when repetitive transport can be handed over to a robot.

The J1600 is built around human-robot collaboration. The operator stays in charge of the work that requires judgment, flexibility and experience, such as picking up a pallet, handling exceptions, or deciding what should happen next. The robot takes over the long, repetitive transport runs that consume time and energy without adding much human value.

“Warehouse automation has been stuck between two extremes,” said Emil Hauch Jensen, CEO of The Mobile Robot Company. “On one side, you have manual work that is flexible but physically repetitive. On the other, you have large automation projects that can be expensive, slow, and difficult to change. We built the J1600 for the space in between.”

The secret is not only that the J1600 can drive itself. It is that it has been made radically easy to use. From the beginning, the goal was to create a robot that a warehouse operator could understand quickly, trust quickly and put to work without waiting for a major automation project.

Operators start tasks from a built-in touchscreen. New destinations can be added by manually driving the truck to a point and pressing “Save Location.” Training takes around 30 minutes. The robot is designed to work out of the box, without extensive IT setup, infrastructure changes, or mandatory Wi-Fi.

That simplicity is the point. The J1600 does not ask companies to redesign their warehouse around the robot. It gives operators a tool that fits into the way they already work.

“We have never seen the warehouse operator as the problem to be automated away,” said Jensen. “We see the operator as the expert in the loop. Our job is to take the repetitive transport off their shoulders, so they can spend more of their time on the work where human judgment actually matters.”

The IFOY jury recognized the J1600 for its dual-mode concept, practical usability and low barrier to entry. The vehicle can be operated like a conventional electric pallet jack, but can also navigate autonomously through warehouse and production environments using 3D LiDAR SLAM technology.

According to the IFOY Innovation Check, the J1600 “defines a new product level between classic AGVs and manual pallet jacks” and was described as “a game changer for low-threshold automation in intralogistics.”

The award is also a challenger story. The Mobile Robot Company was founded in Denmark in November 2024, launched its first product in January 2026, and won Industrial Truck of the Year less than two years after the company was created. In the category, the Danish startup competed alongside some of the most established names in the global forklift and warehouse industry.

“This is first and foremost a Danish startup story,” said Jensen. “We are competing in an industry where the largest players have decades of history, global sales organizations and very large development budgets. Our way in was to solve a problem customers still face every day: how to bring automation into real warehouse and production environments without turning it into a heavy, risky project.”

The J1600 can carry up to 1,600 kg and lift up to 1.6 metres. It uses 3D LiDAR SLAM, supported by an industrial NVIDIA Jetson AI computer, to create three-dimensional maps and navigate in dynamic

environments. Its safety architecture includes dual 2D safety LiDARs, emergency stops, certified components and a 360-degree safety field around the vehicle.

The practical consequence is that companies can automate repetitive pallet transport without removing the human operator from the workflow. IFOY highlighted that the robot can reduce manual labour by up to 80 percent on repetitive transport tasks while keeping human takeover available at any time.

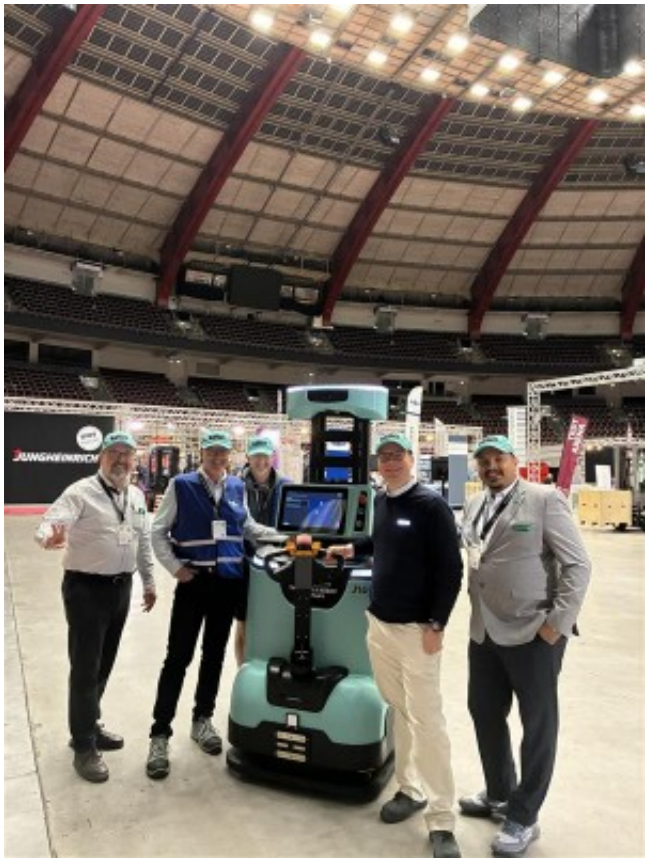
The timing matters because pallet handling remains one of the largest automation opportunities in intralogistics. More than one million pallet jacks are sold globally every year, yet much of the daily movement of pallets in warehouses and factories still depends on people walking back and forth with loads.

“We are not asking customers to change their warehouse for the robot,” said Jensen. “We are giving them a robot that fits into the way they already work. The operator still makes the nuanced decisions. The robot takes the long walks.”

For The Mobile Robot Company, the IFOY win provides independent validation at an early stage in the company’s growth. The startup has already established distributor partnerships in eight countries and is expanding its international partner network.

“We come from Denmark, but we are building for a global problem,” said Jensen. “The IFOY AWARD gives us more than visibility. It shows that a small, focused robotics company can challenge the established players when it solves a real customer need.”

The IFOY AWARD, International Intralogistics and Forklift Truck of the Year, is regarded as one of the world’s leading technology awards in intralogistics. The 2026 competition received 49 entries, with 17 finalists undergoing the multi-stage IFOY Audit during TEST CAMP INTRALOGISTICS. Winners are selected by an independent international jury of trade journalists.



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