

Instructions For Constructing Grey Walter's Tortoise Robot From LEGO Mindstorms Components



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This is a draft, please do not quote

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to describe how to construct a particular robot, which we will call a Grey Walter Tortoise, out of Lego Mindstorms or Lego Dacta components.

This particular robot was inspired by some of the original work on autonomous robots that was accomplished by William Grey Walter in the late 1940s in Bristol (*Grey Walter, 1950, 1951, 1963*). In the original description of this kind of system, the robot was a tricycle-like vehicle. A rear motor powered the robot forward by driving two rear wheels. A front motor steered the robot by turning the front wheel. A light sensor controlled the steering. Under dark conditions, the robot moved forward and slowly turned, seeking light. In medium light conditions, the steering motor stopped, and the robot moved towards the light. In bright conditions, the steering motor was run at double speed, leading to “dazzled” avoiding behavior. The robot was surrounded by a transparent shell (hence its name). When the shell was bumped, the avoiding behavior was initiated as well. Some excellent photographs of the original robots and their behavior can be found at the following web page:

http://www.ias.uwe.ac.uk/extra_pages/gwonline.html.

The current version of the robot that is described in this document is a functional approximation of Grey Walter’s original machines. It is constructed from parts in a LEGO Dacta kit that was purchased for the Biological Computation Project at the University of Alberta; these parts are identical to those that are easily found in LEGO Mindstorms kits. The instructions that are provided below for building the robot describe the third generation of this robot. This generation of the robot differs from earlier generations in terms of incorporating a few more of the principles of LEGO design that are intended to create stronger robots (Martin, 1995). The images that are provided below to show how the robot was constructed were created using a suite of LEGO CAD programs (in particular, MLCAD, L3P, POV-RAY, and LPUB) (Clague, Agullo, & Hassing, 2002). The use of plates and beams to restrict the sight line of the light sensors can be found elsewhere (Baum, 2003).

Because the robot is constructed from LEGO components, the robot is not intended to be an exact duplicate of the original. We have attempted to create a robot that has similar sensor capabilities to the original, and have programmed its behavior using Not Quite C (NQC). NQC is available from the following web page:

<http://www.baumfamily.org/nqc/>.

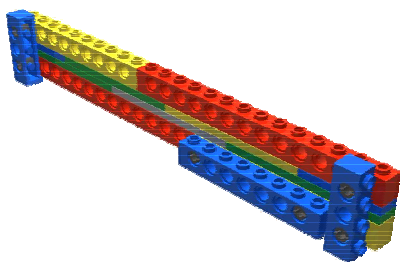
At this time of writing, we have not compiled video footage of the behavior of this generation of tortoise. However, several examples of the behavior of previous generations of this machine that we have explored can be viewed at the following web page:

<http://www.bcp.psych.ualberta.ca/~mike/Book2/Robots/Walter/index.html>.

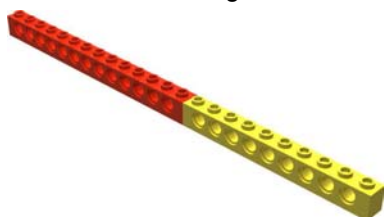
By the end of the fall of 2003, it is hoped that some new videos of the current generation of robots will be available.

Stage 1 – Build The Left Side

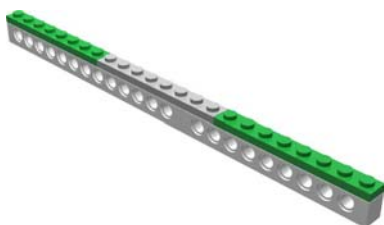
The first stage in constructing this robot is to build the left side of its chassis, which is illustrated below. The constructed side can be considered to be a beam that is 24 LEGO studs long. The beam is reinforced by two 4-stud beams attached to either end, in accordance with Martin's paper The art of LEGO design. An 8-stud beam is attached to the side to provide support for an axle that is attached later.



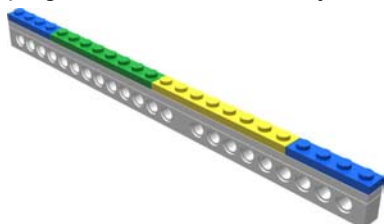
Step 1: Lay two beams end to end to create a 1 X 24 length



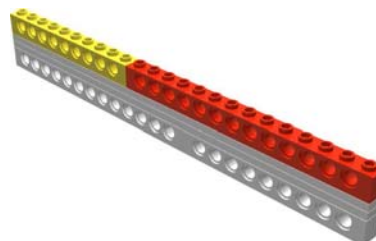
Step 2: Attach a layer of plates to the beams to hold them together. Don't overlap a seam between plates with the seam between the two beams.



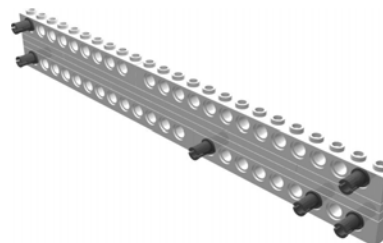
Step 3: Attach another layer of plates to the previous layer, once again avoiding the overlapping of seams between adjacent layers



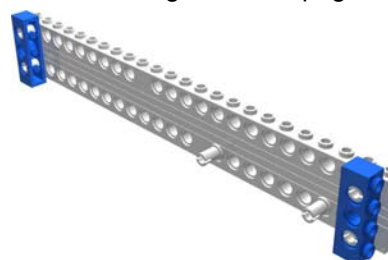
Step 4: Attach a final layer of beams to the top layer of plates.



Step 5: Insert 6 black pegs to be used to attach shorter beams to the side



Step 6: Attach a 1X4 beam to each end of the side using the black pegs



Step 7: Attach a 1X8 beam to the side using the remaining two black pegs

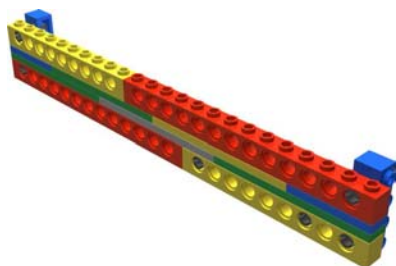


When this last step is carried out, Stage 1 is complete. The next stage involves building a wheel and axle assembly that will be attached to this side.

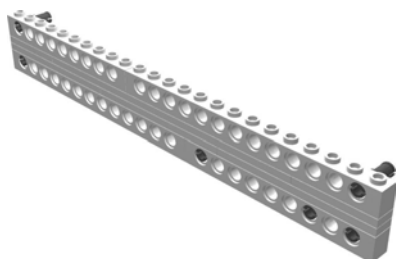
At this point, the left side of the robot chassis is now complete. The next stage is to build a mirror image of this assembly that will serve as the right side of the robot chassis.

Stage 2: Build The Right Side

The right side of the robot chassis is constructed in exactly the same manner as was the left side during Stage 1. The only difference is to ensure that this side is a mirror image of the left side, reflected across the length of the 24-stud structure. The completed right side is illustrated below.



The mirror image nature of this side, in comparison with the left, is determined by how the black pegs are placed into the long beam that has been constructed. In particular, the pegs go in the same holes as were used previously, but the pegs poke out the other side of the structure, as is shown below.



Stage 3: Assemble The Rear Axle Components

When the two sides are connected together to create a chassis, a rear axle will be part of the assembly. It will be easier to add the axle before the sides are connected together. Before this can be done, the axle components must themselves be put together, which is done in this stage.

Step 1: Start with the left side of the assembly. Take an 8 stud axle, and attach an offset pulley to one end of it.



Step 2: Add a 20X30 medium balloon wheel to the axle, touching the offset pulley.



Step 3: Add two bushes to the axle, touching the other side of the wheel.



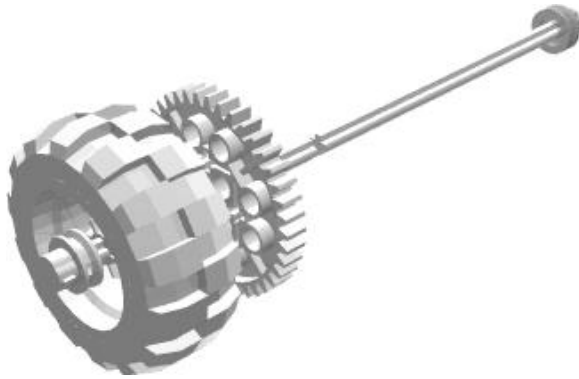
Step 4: Add a 40 tooth gear to the axle, touching the rightmost bush that is already on the axle.



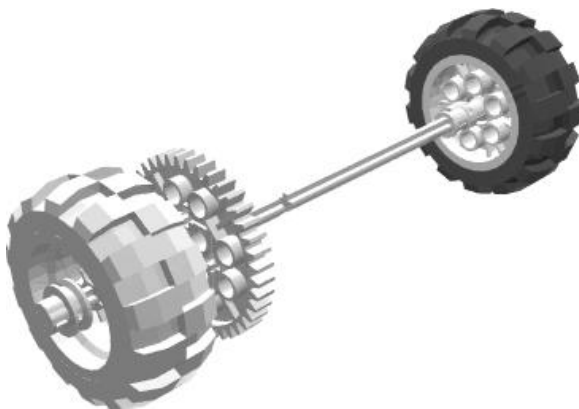
Step 5: Add a tire to the wheel on the axle.



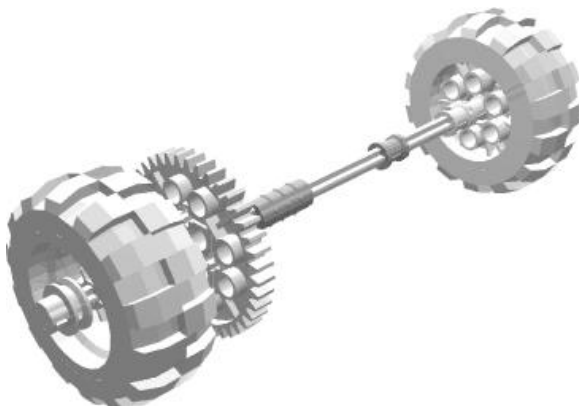
Step 6: Take a 10 stud axle and add an offset pulley to its end.



Step 7: Repeat the previous procedure to add a wheel, two bushes, and a tire to the end of this axle.



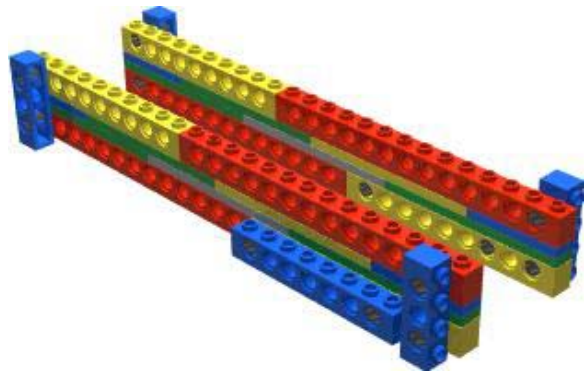
Step 8: A bush will be added to hold the right axle in place on the chassis, and an axle connector will hold the two axles together, and keep the left axle in place when it is on the frame. However, don't add these two parts yet. They should be added when the chassis is being put together in the next stage.



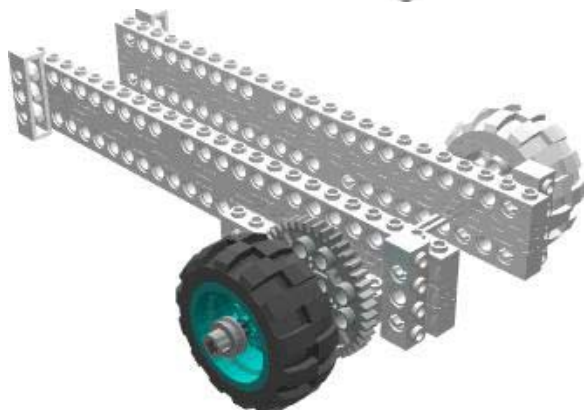
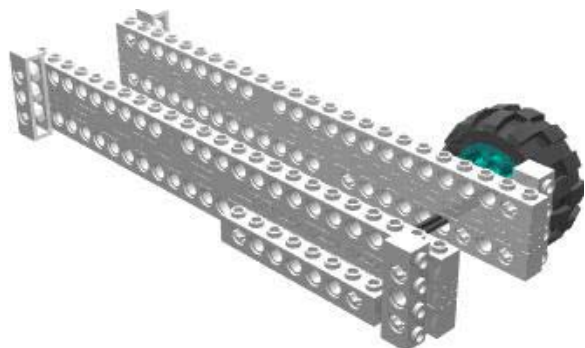
Stage 4: Assemble The Chassis

The two sides can now be axled and connected together using 2X6 plates to create the main chassis to which all other components will be attached.

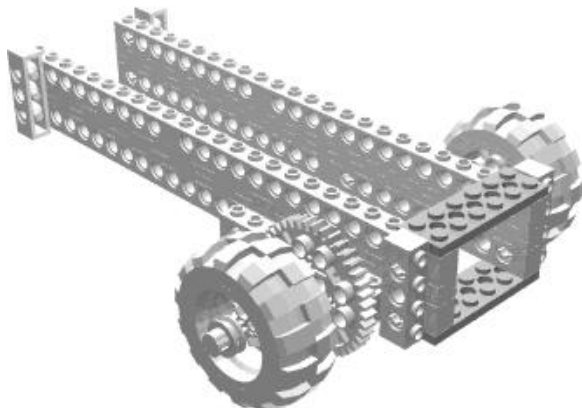
Step 1: Take the two sides and lay them side by side.



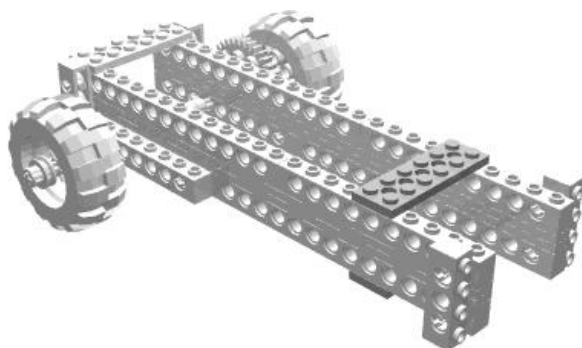
Step 2: Take the two parts of the axle assembly, and thread them through each side. Put them both through the hole closest to the back of the frame. Use a bush to hold the right axle tight against the right side, and use an axle connector to hold the two axles together (as in the last step of Stage 3).



Step 3: Take two 2X6 plates with holes, and connect them to the top and the bottom of the back of the two sides. This will hold the sides together using parts that will help to keep the chassis from twisting.



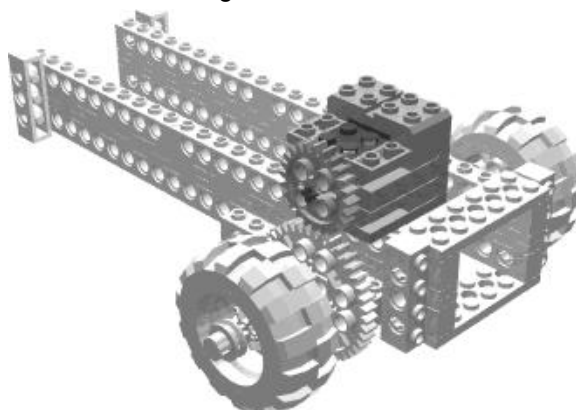
Step 4: Take two more 2X6 plates (with holes) and connect them to the top and the bottom of the front of the robot. For this chassis, four studs should be free on the top of the chassis in front of the plates.



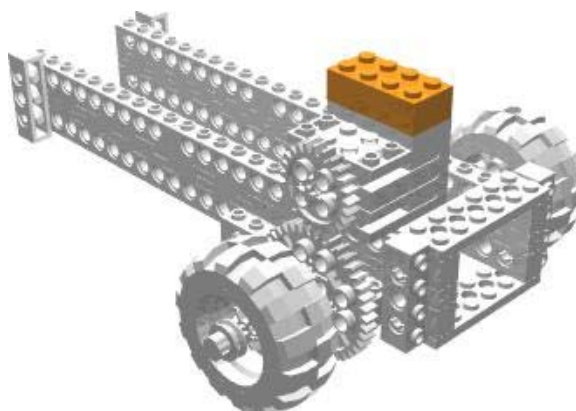
Stage 5: Attach The Rear Motor

A rear motor can now be attached to the chassis to drive the rear axle. The motor's perch on the chassis is a bit precarious, so it will have to be reinforced by using bricks to connect it to the RCX which will also be mounted on the frame at this time..

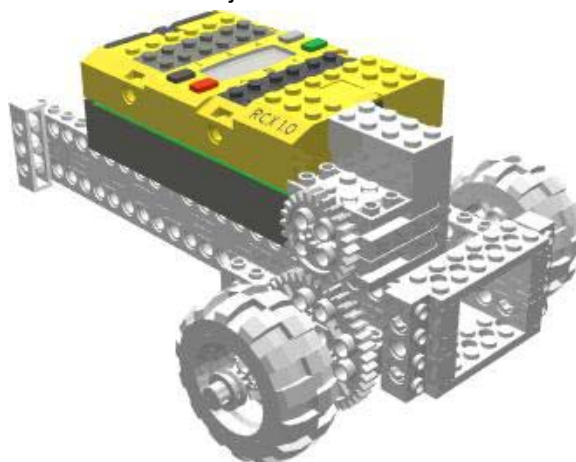
Step 1: Attach a motor that has a 24 tooth gear on it to the chassis in such a way that it meshes with the gear on the rear axle.



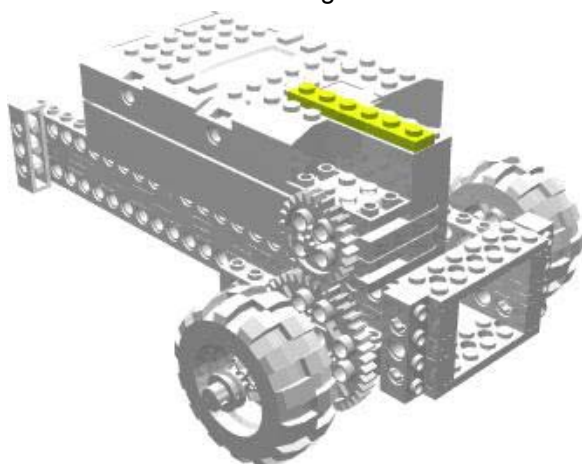
Step 2 Attach a 2X4 brick onto the top of the motor.



Step 3 Attach the RCX brick to the frame so that it adjoins the motor.



Step 4 Use a 1X6 plate to connect the brick on the motor to the top of the RCX. This should hold the motor well in place when the robot is running.



Stage 6: Build The Front Axle

The general design of the robot chassis is like a tricycle. The two wheels at the back of the robot will be used to drive it forwards, with one motor rotating the axle that both wheels are attached to. A third wheel is required at the front of the robot. This third wheel is active, in the sense that it will be steered by being rotated by a second motor that will be attached to the front of the robot. So, a gear must be added to this axle to allow it to be rotated.

Step 1: Take an 8-stud length axle, and attach to one end of it a perpendicular axle joiner.



Step 2: Take two bushes, and place them side by side on the axle, so that the lower of the two is in direct contact with the perpendicular axle joiner.



Step 3: Another bush, and a smooth 1/2 bush, are then added to the axle. The space between this pair and the previous pair will be occupied by the lower plate on the front of the robot.



Step 4: Attach a 24 tooth crown gear, teeth pointing down, above the 1/2 bush.



Step 5: Attach a $\frac{1}{2}$ bush to one end of a 3 stud axle, and insert the axle through the perpendicular axle joiner.



Step 6: Attach wedge belt wheel, and a wedge belt tire, to the short axle.



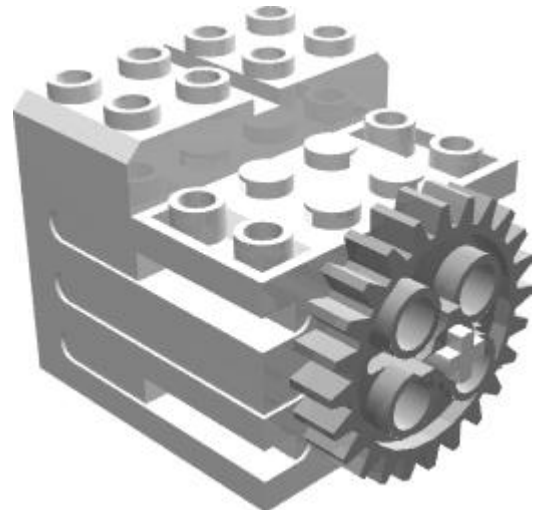
Step 7: Attach a half bush to the other end of the short axle to prevent the wedge belt wheel from falling off. Make sure that the two half bushes on the short axle are not pressed in too tight to prevent the wheel from spinning fairly easily.



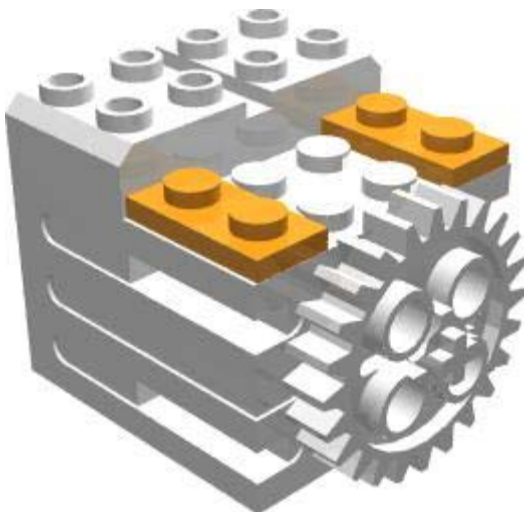
Stage 7: Build The Front Motor Assembly

In this stage, a small front motor assembly is constructed. This will be used to rotate the axle that was just constructed, and will be attached from underneath the chassis.

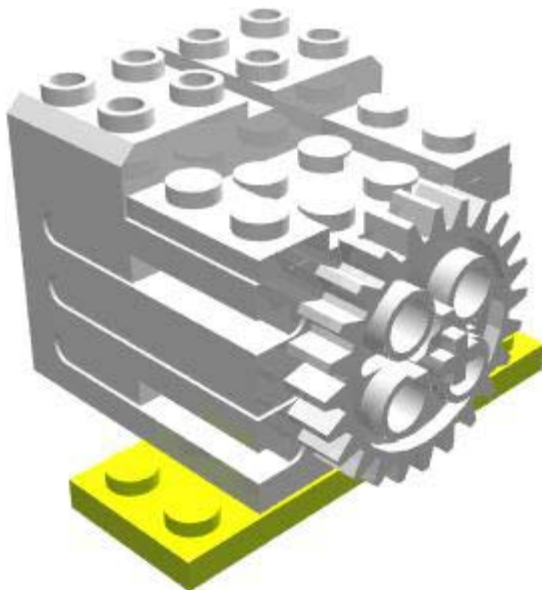
Step 1: Take a 9V motor and attach a 24 tooth gear to it.



Step 2: Attach two 1X2 plates to the motor. Later these will be used to hold it in place using the top of the chassis.



Step 3: Attach a 2X6 plate to the bottom of the motor. Later this will be used to attach it to the bottom of the chassis.

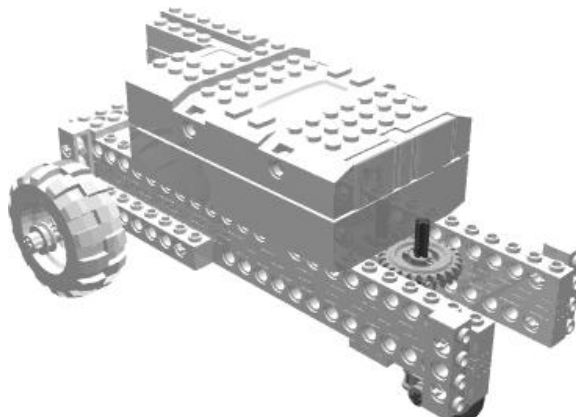


Stage 8: Attach The Front Axle And Motor To The Robot Chassis

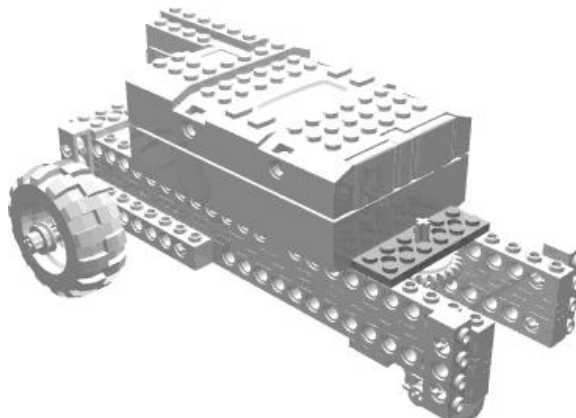
In this stage, the front wheel is added to the chassis, and the front motor is attached to the chassis in order to steer the robot.

Step 1: Take the complete chassis that has been instructed, and temporarily remove the top front 2X6 plate with holes. Insert the front axle assembly through the middle hole in such a way

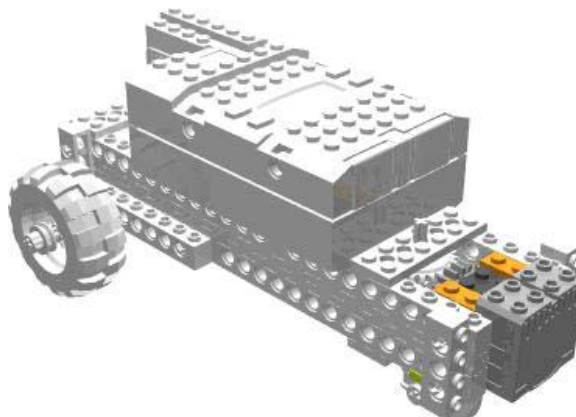
that one bush is below the lower plate, and the other bush (and 1/2 bush and crown gear) are above the lower plate.



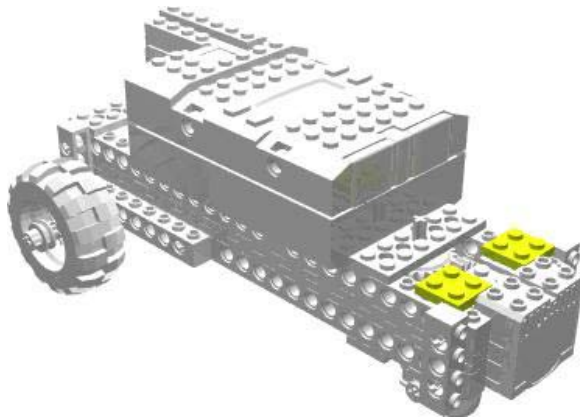
Step 2: Re-attach the top 2X6 plate with holes so that the top of the front axle passes through its middle hole.



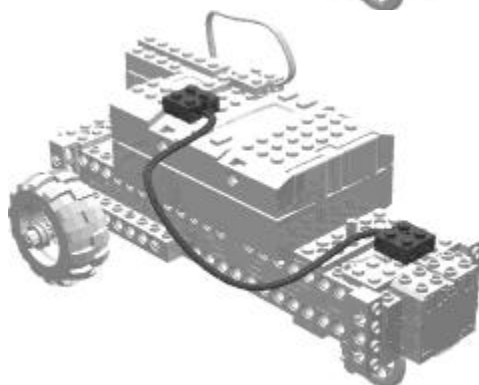
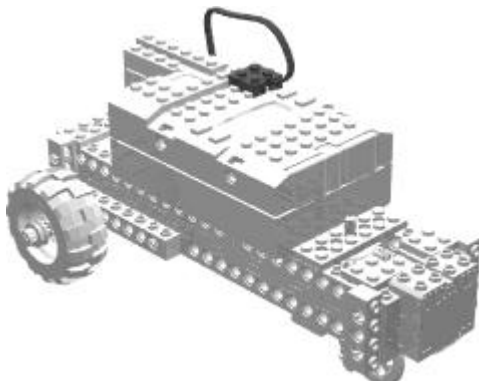
Step 3: Attach the front motor assembly. Ease it in from the bottom, positioning it so that its gear meshes with the crown gear on the axle, and so that the free studs from the bottom plate on the motor can be pressed into the bottom of the chassis.



Step 4: Add two 2X2 plates to attach the two small plates on the top of the motor to the two sides of the chassis. This should be enough to hold the motor in place when the robot is operating.



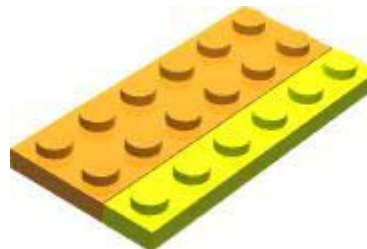
Step 5: Use an electric cable to attach the rear motor to Output Port A and another cable to attach the front motor to Output Port C.



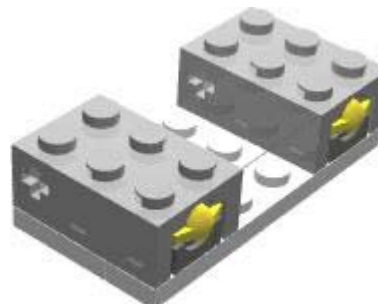
Stage 9: Construct Two Touch Sensor Assemblies

Before the chassis can be completed, we have to construct two assemblies of touch sensors. One will be mounted on the front of the robot, and the other will be mounted on its back.

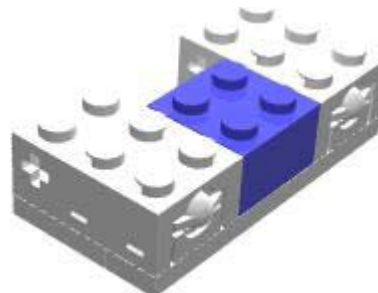
Step 1: Take a 2X6 plate and a 1X6 plate and lay them side by side.



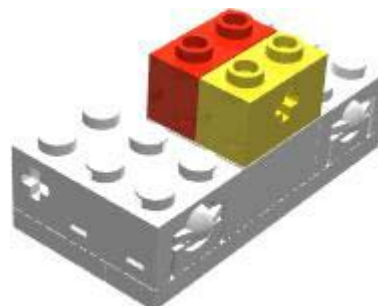
Step 2: Use two touch sensors to attach the two plates together. Each sensor is placed at an end of the length of the plates.



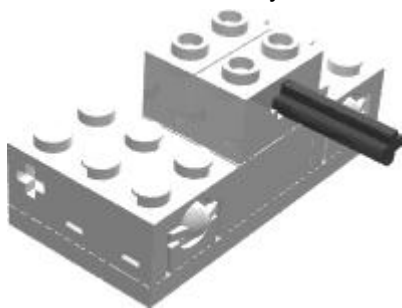
Step 3: Attach a 2X2 brick between the two touch sensors, aligned with their button end.



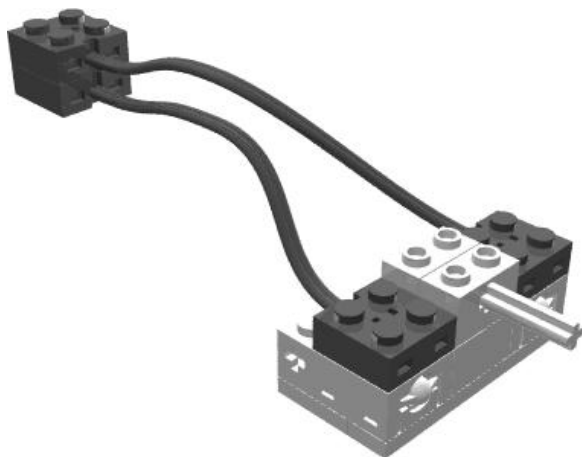
Step 4: Attach two 1X2 bricks with axle holes to the 2X2 brick. Align both axle holes so that when an axle is inserted it will pass through both of these bricks, and will be parallel to the lengths of the two touch sensors.



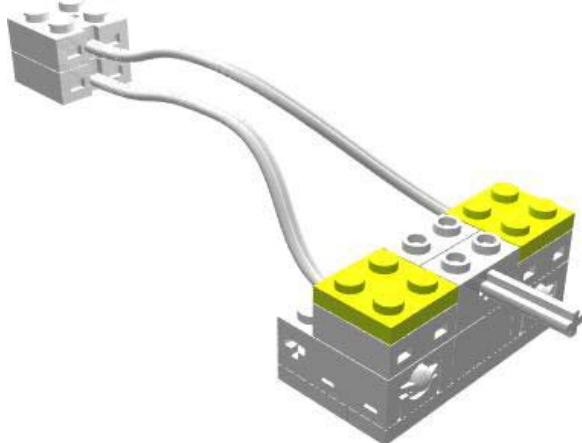
Step 5: Insert a 4 stud axle into the axle hole of the two bricks on top. Insert it so that it just reaches the end of the 1X2 brick at the back of this assembly.



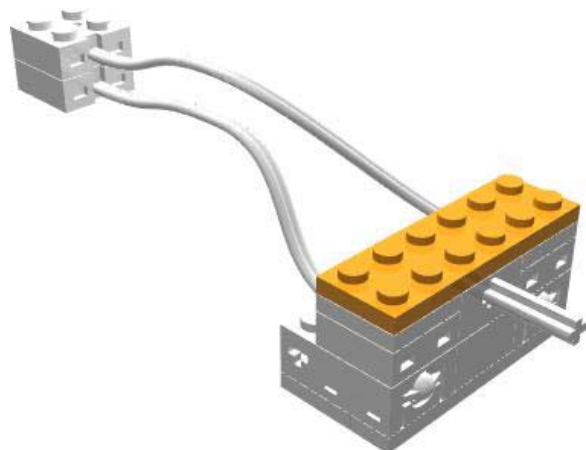
Step 6: Attach electric cables to each touch sensor. Attach the other end of the cables to each other; they will be stacked on an input port.



Step 7: Attach two 2X2 plates to the top of each electric plate on the two touch sensors.



Step 8: Attach a 2X6 plate to the top of the touch sensor assembly to complete it.



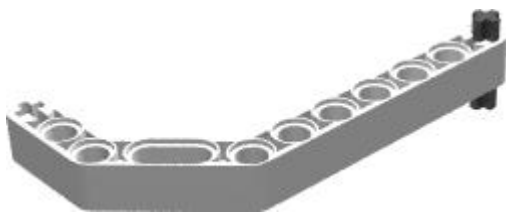
Step 9: Repeat the previous steps to build a second touch sensor assembly. One will have to reach from the rear of the robot to the front input ports, and so should have medium length cables. The other will need shorter cables, because it will be attached to the robot close to the input ports.



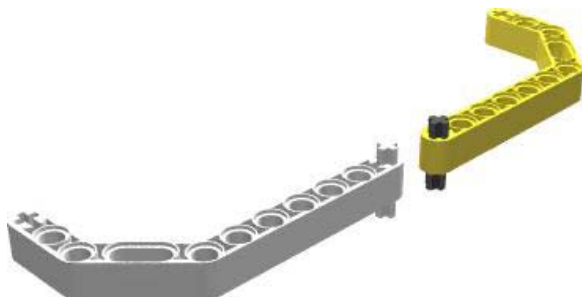
Stage 10: Build A "Feeler" For Both The Front And The Back Touch Sensor Assemblies

In order for the touch sensors to work, an apparatus must be constructed to be mounted in front of them. When the robot bumps into an obstacle, the "feeler" will be pushed backwards, depressing one or both of the touch sensor buttons. This will increase the range of the touch sensors far beyond the immediate physical location of their buttons.

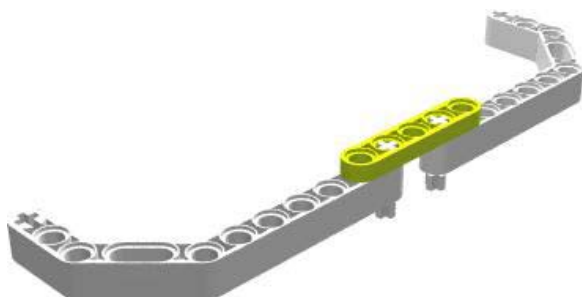
Step 1: Take a 1 X 11.5 double bent lift arm, and insert a notched 2 stud axle through its straight end. The axle should protrude from the top and the bottom of the lift arm.



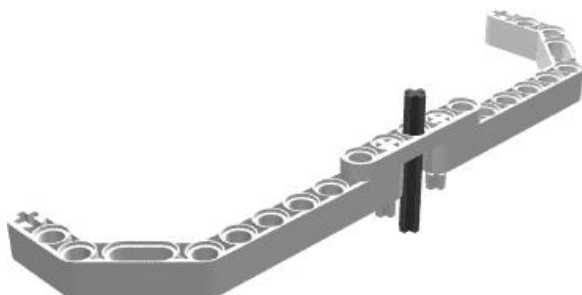
Step 2: Repeat the previous step with a second lift arm and notched axle.



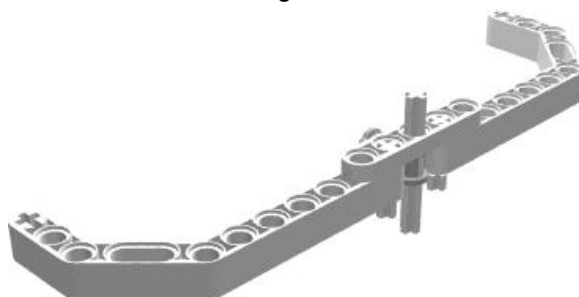
Step 3: Take a straight 1X5 lift arm and place it over the two axles. One axle should be inside the second hole of this lift arm, while the other should be inside the fourth hole. The two end holes of the short lift arm should not be used.



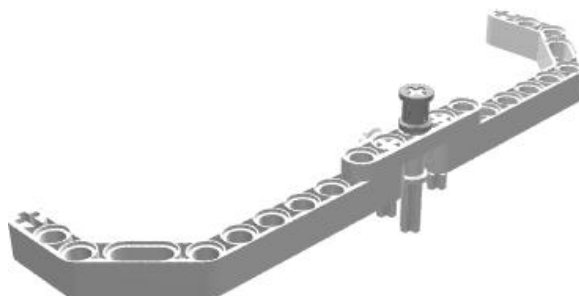
Step 4: Take a 4 stud axle and insert it through the middle of the short liftarm.



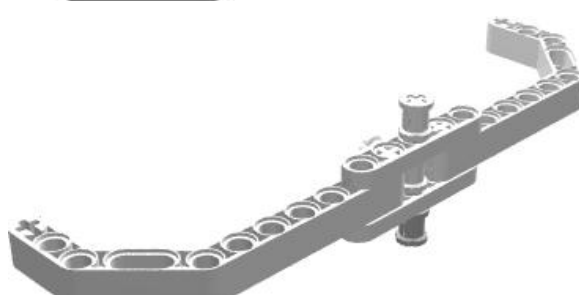
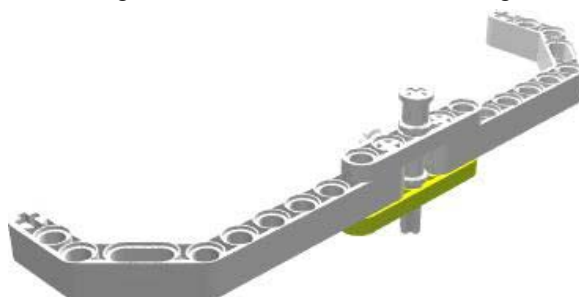
Step 5: Attach a Technic connector with an axle hole to the axle. The axle hole should be pointing in the same direction as the bent arms of the longer lift arms.



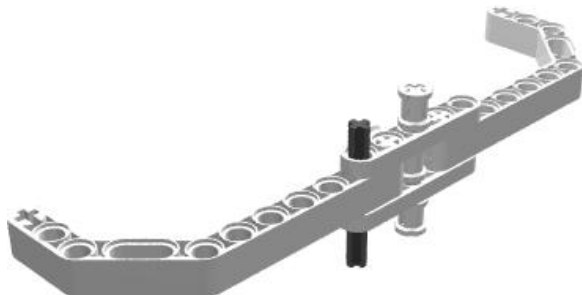
Step 6: Attach a bush to the top of the axle that is sticking through the center of the assembly.



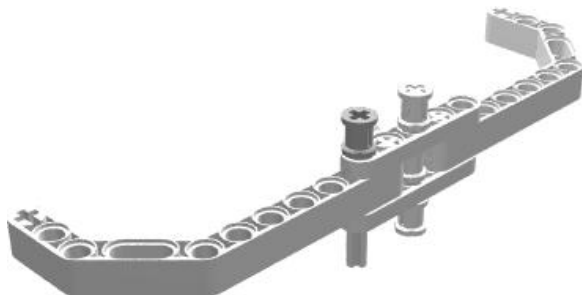
Step 7: Place a second 1X5 lift arm on the bottom of the assembly. The long axle will pass through the middle hole of this lift arm, and the two short axles will fall inside two of the other holes. Then hold this second lift arm in place by attaching a bush to the bottom of the long axle



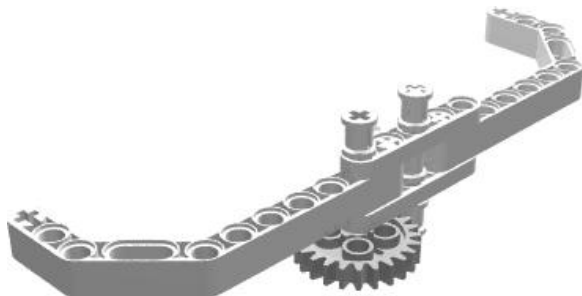
Step 8: Take Another 4 stud axle, and insert it through the end hole of the short lift arm, all the way through the entire assembly.



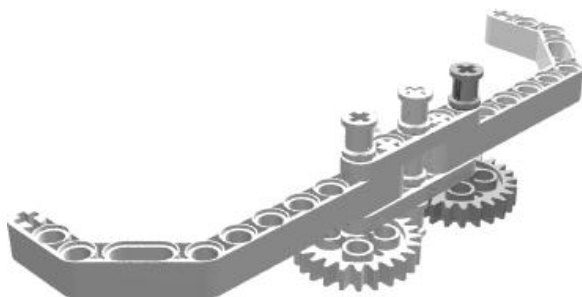
Step 9: Attach a bush to the top of this axle.



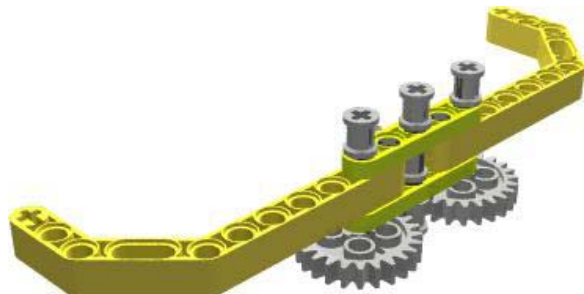
Step 10: Attach a 24 tooth gear to the bottom of this axle. This gear is the component that will be pushed into a touch sensor button.



Step 11: Use an axle, bush, and gear to repeat the previous three steps on the other side of the short lift arm.



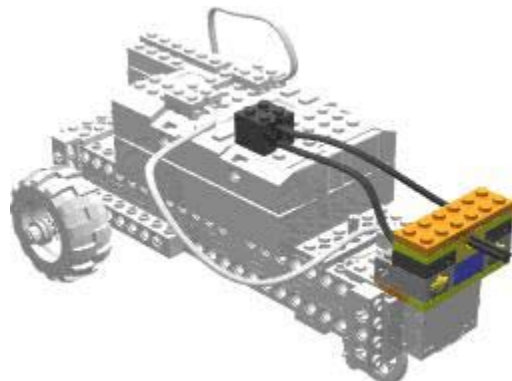
Step 12: Repeat all of the previous steps to construct a second "feeler". One will be mounted on the back of the robot, while the other will be mounted on the front of the robot.



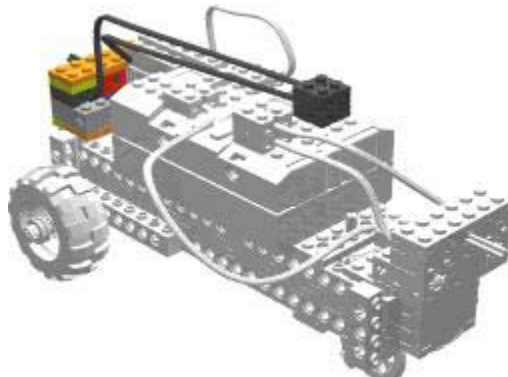
Stage 11: Attach The Remaining Components To Finish The Robot

We now have all of the components that are required to finish assembling the robot.

Step 1: Attach the touch sensor assembly with the shorter electrical cables onto the top of the front motor. Plug the other end of the cables, stacked together, onto Input Port 3.

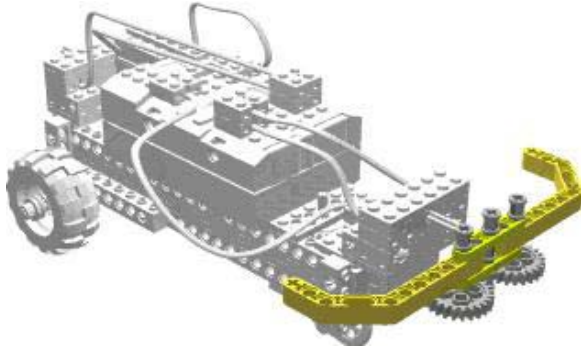


Step 2: Attach the second set of touch sensors (longer cables) to the rear of the robot by placing it on top of the 2X6 plate on the back of the machine. Plug the other end of the cables, stacked together, onto Input Port 1.

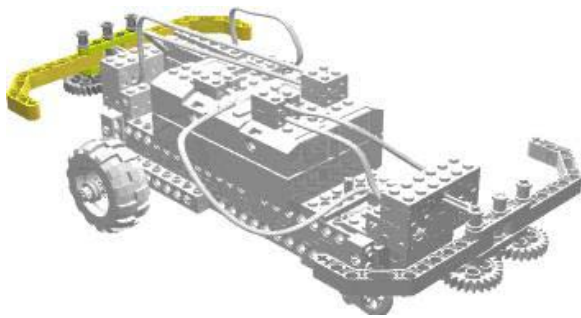


Step 3: Attach one set of “feelers” onto the axle protruding from the front touch sensor assembly.

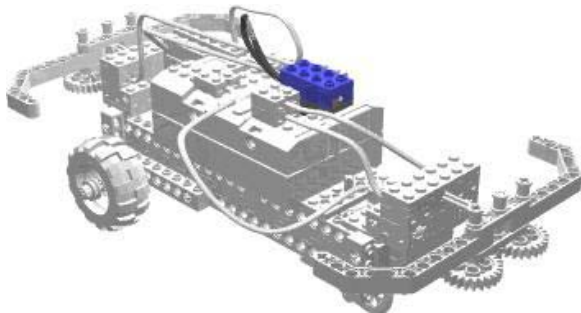
You will have a little flexibility for positioning them in such a way to maximize the sensitivity of this apparatus.



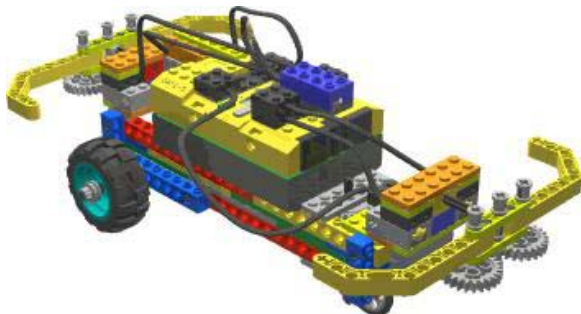
Step 4: Repeat the previous step, attaching a “feeler” to the axle protruding from the rear touch sensor assembly.



Step 5: Attach the electric cable from a light sensor onto Input Port 2. Mount the light sensor directly on top of this electrical plate.



Robot assembly is now complete!



Software

Now that the robot has been constructed, a program must be written and downloaded to the RCX brick to control the motors on the basis of the values detected by the sensors. Here is a draft example program written in NQC. One reason that the current document is in draft format is because this program is not as nice as I would like it to be.

```

/* global variable definitions here */
int TIME_A;          /* time to run motor A */
int TIME_C;          /* time to run motor C */

int PAUSE_A;         /* time to pause motor A */
int PAUSE_C;         /* time to pause motor C */

int SPEED_C;         /* power for steering motor C */
int LIGHT;           /* value of light sensor */

int BUMP;            /* make it 1 when an obstacle is bumped */

#define DARKTHETA 650 /* light threshold for exploring (explore when darker)
*/
#define BRIGHTTHETA 500 /* light threshold for avoiding (avoid when brighter)
*/

#define SEEK 1        /* turning speed when seeking */
#define SEEK_T 80     /* turning pause when seeking */

#define HALT 0         /* turning speed when going straight */
#define HALT_T 50     /* turning pause when going straight */

#define FLEE 1         /* turning speed when avoiding */
#define FLEE_T 40     /* turning pause when avoiding */

/* This routine runs the rear motor to move the robot ahead */
task drive() {
while (BUMP == 0)
{
    OnFwd(OUT_A);          /* run the motor forward */
    Wait(TIME_A);          /* wait for a period of time */
    Float(OUT_A);          /* turn the motor off */
    Wait(PAUSE_A);         /* wait for a different period of time */
}
}

task bumpalert(){
while (true)
{
    BUMP = SENSOR_3; /* read the touch sensor */
    if (BUMP == 1)
    {
        start avoid;
    }
}
}

/* This routine reverses the rear motor to avoid an obstacle */
task avoid() {
/* set the steering values for high speed turning */
stop bumpalert;

```

```

PAUSE_C = FLEE_T;
SPEED_C = FLEE;
Float(OUT_A);
Wait(PAUSE_A);
repeat (3)
{
    OnRev(OUT_A);          /* run the motor in reverse */
    Wait(TIME_A);          /* wait for a period of time */
    Float(OUT_A);          /* turn the motor off */
    Wait(PAUSE_A);         /* wait for a different period of time */
}
BUMP = 0;
start steerspeed;
start drive;
start bumpalert;
}

/* This routine sets steering speed as a function of light */
task steerspeed() {
while (BUMP == 0)
{
    /* default settings: go straight */

    if ((SENSOR_2 > BRIGHTTHETA) && (SENSOR_2 < DARKTHETA))
    {
        PAUSE_C = HALT_T; /* no turning in medium light */
        SPEED_C = HALT;
    }

    if (SENSOR_2 < BRIGHTTHETA) /* high turning in brightness */
    {
        PAUSE_C = FLEE_T;
        SPEED_C = FLEE;
    }

    if (SENSOR_2 > DARKTHETA) /* slow turning in darkness */
    {
        PAUSE_C = SEEK_T;
        SPEED_C = SEEK;
    }
}
}

/* This routine runs the front steering motor */
task steer() {
while (true)
{
    SetPower(OUT_C, SPEED_C);
    Float (OUT_C);
    if (SPEED_C > 0)
    {
        OnFwd(OUT_C);
        Wait(TIME_C);          /* wait for the read 'time' */
        Float(OUT_C);          /* turn the motor back on */
        Wait(PAUSE_C);
    }
}
}

```

```
task main(){

/* Set input 2 to be a light sensor */
  SetSensorType(SENSOR_2, SENSOR_TYPE_LIGHT);

/* Set input 2 to work in raw mode */
  SetSensorMode(SENSOR_2, SENSOR_MODE_RAW);

/* Set input 3 to be a touch sensor */
  SetSensorType(SENSOR_3, SENSOR_TYPE_TOUCH);

/* Set input 3 to work in boolean mode */
  SetSensorMode(SENSOR_3, SENSOR_MODE_BOOL);

/* set the drive motor to run at a power of 5 */
  SetPower(OUT_A, 5);

/* Display sensor 2 on the RCX monitor */
  SelectDisplay (DISPLAY_SENSOR_2);

/* initialize the global variables */
  TIME_A = 50;           /* time to run drive motor */
  PAUSE_A = 50;          /* time to run */
  BUMP = 0;              /* not bumped...yet! */

/* start the robots tasks */
start drive;             /* engage the rear motor to push the robot forward */

start steerspeed;
start steer;             /* engage the front motor to steer the robot */

start bumpalert;

}
```


References

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