Pack mule robot could aid soldiers, marines

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The military is constantly seeking the right balance between preparedness and maneuverability. Theoretically, we could turn foot soldiers into walking arsenals with nearly-impenetrable armor, but they wouldn't be very mobile. Boston Dynamics may have a solution [1]—they're developing a quadruped pack mule 'bot for the military. Funded by DARPA and the US Marines Corps, the LS3 (Legged Squad Support Systems) is "a dynamic robot designed to go anywhere Soldiers and Marines go on foot."

The AT-AT [2] lookalike will carry 400 lbs., have a range of 20 miles, and last 24 hours. To call the LS3 an RPV (Remotely Piloted Vehicle) would be a misnomer—the vehicle requires no driver and either follows a designated individual (a squad or platoon leader, for example), or navigates to a preprogrammed location using sensing and GPS.

My only caveat would be speed—if the LS3 can't keep up, that would defeat the

purpose of having a pack mule ‘bot. But 400 lbs. *off* the backs of soldiers and marines would be tremendously beneficial. That’s enough for extra ammo and advanced equipment for contingencies.

Boston Dynamics is partnering with Bell Helicopter, AAI Corporation, Carnegie Mellon, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and Woodward HRT to develop the LS3, the latter of which should take its first steps in 2012.

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[1] http://www.bostondynamics.com/robot_ls3.html
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