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"Red" Rover

NASA is about to re-task one of the Mars rovers.

By *JOHN LABUS*

It could be called the "**Energizer Bunny**" of the space program; Opportunity was one of two vehicles sent to explore the Red Planet in 2004.

"**Opportunity** was the golden child of the two rovers. It landed in a crater, so it's basically a 300-million mile interplanetary hole-in-one!"

Dr. Doug Ming, manager of the Human Exploration Science Office at **Johnson Space Center** says the rover is about to explore another crater - seven years into a mission that was originally scheduled to last 90 days. He credits the engineers who designed and built both Opportunity and its fellow rover Spirit.

"They lasted well past their warranties, and we're so glad they did because the science that they have discovered after their prime missions has been really key to improving understanding of the processes on the surface of Mars."

NASA ceased operations with Spirit more than a year ago, after they lost contact with the rover. But space historian Robert Zimmerman with "**Behind the Black.com**" says Opportunity keeps going, and going, and going.

"They have some wheel problems; it has to drive backwards to try to take some wear off one of its wheels. But other than that, the thing keeps working. It's just a great achievement."

Zimmermann says that when humans finally reach Mars, they will be able to complete the same tasks in about a week. Opportunity has covered about 20-miles during its years on Mars.