A Starship delivery robot, slammed to the ground at the University of Tennessee

In April 2022, weeks after Starship's delivery robots came to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, two students took a food order out of one, tried to shove its antenna into its compartment, and one of them slammed it to the ground on video; both were charged with felony vandalism over a $5,500 robot.



By the Clerk · 29 April 2022 · 2 min read

CASE:	BAS-0024
SUBJECT:	Two University of Tennessee students, 19 and 20
OBJECT:	A Starship Technologies food-delivery robot
DATE:	29 April 2022
PLACE:	Fraternity Park Drive, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
FILED:	25 October 2026
GRADE:	HARM · INDIVIDUAL

Facts

Starship Technologies' food-delivery robots had only recently come to the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, WATE reports, bringing students and staff their orders from the campus dining services. They drive themselves on a mix of computer vision and GPS, at up to 4 miles an hour. Starship's homepage today describes its robots as using "radars, cameras, sensors and machine learning to identify objects and navigate the world around them."

On the evening of 29 April 2022 two students, 19 and 20, came to collect the older one's food order from a robot in the 1800 block of Fraternity Park Drive. According to the incident reports WATE read, once they had the food the two tried to shove the robot's antenna inside its top compartment, and the 19-year-old then picked the robot up and slammed it to the ground.

A video of it was posted to social media, by whom the sources do not say; WKRN, carrying the same report, says it appears to have since been deleted, and that it "allegedly" shows the 19-year-old slamming the

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robot down. Members of Starship's crew identified the two from social-media posts, and data logs from the university's Office of Information Technology placed both in that spot at that time.

Each was charged with one count of felony vandalism over $2,500. The robot costs $5,500 to replace. A bonded arraignment was set for 13 May. All three outlets print both students' names; this record does not.

Statements

None of the sources read for this record quotes the students, Starship or the university. What is known of the act comes from the incident reports, as WATE and WKRN summarise them.

For the record

The robot came to hand over a dinner, and its compartment was the first thing open to the two students who ordered it. Once the food was out, the next thing they tried to put in was the robot's own antenna.

The act went out on social media, and the posts are what found them: Starship's crew identified the two from them, and the university's logs agreed.

Mitigating circumstances

The account of what happened is the police's, passed on by one local reporter and rewritten by a radio station; WKRN marks the slam as alleged, and the video it would rest on was taken down. $5,500 is what the robot costs to replace, and no source says whether it was beyond repair. No source reports what either student said, or how the charges ended.



SOURCES

1. Lexi O'Haver, Arrests made after damage to UT food robot (archived), WATE 6 On Your Side, 5 May 2022
2. Lexi O'Haver, Video of UT college student attacking food-delivery robot leads to 2 arrests (archived), WKRN News 2, 5 May 2022
3. Sarah Tate, 2 Tennessee Students Arrested For Attacking Delivery Robot (archived), NewsRadio 600 WREC (iHeart), 5 May 2022
4. Starship Technologies: Autonomous robot delivery (archived), Starship Technologies, 2026

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