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My grill's name is Tracy. We talk and text.

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The voice-activated SmartGrill tells you exactly when to flip your meat, fish or veggies. (Lynx)

Place rib-eye steak, 1.5-inch, on burners one and two."

My grill — her name is Tracy — is talking to me in an electronic voice. I'm being texted the same information. Minutes later, she has more to say.

"Flip rib-eye steak, 1.5-inch, medium-rare: side one."

This smart grill (actually called the SmartGrill, by Downey, Calif., company Lynx) is voice-activated, meaning I can talk to Tracy, too — for example, to tell her to start cooking — though topics of conversation are somewhat limited.

Tracy's name was given to her by Damian Ibarra, an engineer who worked on the design. Today, I'm in my backyard with Ibarra and Andres Dangond, Lynx's executive chef, grilling four beautiful rib-eye steaks, two with Tracy's assistance and two all by myself. That is to say, I'm using the SmartGrill but without Tracy's direction, relying on my own grilling experience. In the American tradition of Garry Kasparov vs. IBM's Deep Blue or John Henry vs. the steam-powered drill, this is our backyard version of Man vs. Machine.

Dangond, who cooked at Michelin-starred restaurants Alinea and L2O, developed recipes accessible when Tracy's on-board computer interacts with an iPhone or similar device and connects to a wireless network. Tracy tracks what's cooking and tells us what to do next.

"We want to remove all the fear from grilling," says Dangond. "Everyone should feel comfortable buying the most expensive cut of meat without fear of ruining it."

And whoever owns this grill would probably prefer expensive cuts. The Smart Grill starts at \$6,000 for a 30-inch built-in grill and goes up to \$9,500 for a 42-inch free-standing model. It's stainless steel and took four guys to hoist up to my deck. (The company lent the grill for this road test.)

"If I had a restaurant," Dangond said, gesturing to Tracy, "I'd want a bunch of these."

A key advantage of SmartGrills is that they enable humans to receive voice and/or text alerts when it's time to place meat, fish or vegetables on the grill, when it's time to turn them, and when they're ready to be served.

With a competitive streak probably not shared by Tracy, I wanted to see which of us could cook the best steak.

I've been grilling since the 1960s. As this was Tracy's first rodeo (she'd arrived in bubble wrap), I generously cut her some slack. At first, she showed some hesitation to connect with the Internet. I was glad I had technicians there to fiddle with iPhones and iPads until the connection was made and Tracy was online.

Once going, Tracy's propane-fueled burners cranked to 700 degrees for a beautiful sear on the meat. I had asked for medium-rare, although she can cook at any temperature requested.

All the steaks looked and tasted fantastic. But how did mine compare with Tracy's?

Seeking an impartial panel of judges, I'd enlisted four civilians — a psychologist, a broadcast journalist, a health care professional and an actual judge — to participate in blind back-to-back tastings. The decision was split: Half liked Tracy's, and half liked mine.

I thought mine was a more accurate medium-rare, but I'll take the tie. This could be the beginning of a beautiful relationship.