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FSAE team participates in international competition

By **Rebecca Wyatt Thomas**, OU Web Writer

This year, **OU's Formula SAE** team took a new approach when designing their car to race in the 2008 Formula SAE competition: simple is better. After enduring disappointing vehicle issues at the last three annual competitions, this year's team hopes the simple approach will earn them a better finish. The Formula SAE competition will take place May 14-18 at the Michigan International Speedway.

"We have addressed every issue that has caused us to fail in the past," said Matt Schmalenberg, treasurer for OU's SAE team. Last year an air bubble in the site tube where the gas tank is filled caused the team to drop in the standings. In 2006, the muffler fell off the car leading to a disqualification; in 2005, a steering gear failure left the team sidelined and in 2004, a hot start issue left the team cold. "We decided to keep everything simple this year. The less stuff there is on the car, the less likely something will break and there will be a problem."

Even the car design is different. A wider driver compartment with a different frame caused the car to be 10 percent lighter and 50 percent stronger. The team also cut the car's weight by using smaller wheels and tires.

Approximately a dozen students of all majors have been working on the redesigned car since shortly after the competition wrapped up last year. Each year, the car has to be rebuilt from the ground up for this competition.

"We've gained a lot of experience working on this car," Schmalenberg said. The team has learned how to design nearly every aspect of their car, problem solve and also work with vendors to secure the appropriate parts.

During the international competition, which draws students from all over the world, the teams compete in endurance, acceleration, autocross and skid pad areas. The OU team builds their car in a garage on campus and tests and fine tunes the car in the parking lots around campus. Student drivers compete for the chance to race the car in the competition.

This is Oakland's seventh year participating in the Formula SAE competition, which has been going on since 1981. The team's best finish was in 2003 when it came in 13th in the world.

"We are always looking for ways to improve the car and better ourselves," Schmalenberg said.

The team learns a lot from the competition and from each other, but they also learn from the members of three teams OU hosts before the competitions. OU will again host teams from Finland, Austria and Australia as they prepare for the competition. The teams work side-by-side with the OU team in the OU garage preparing the cars they have shipped over to compete in the competition.

Chrysler Foundation's Aid to Higher Education program supports OU's Formula SAE team.

OU's Formula SAE team is always recruiting new members. Students from any major who want to work on the car or the business aspect of the operation can visit the **Formula SAE** Web site for more information.



Matt Schmalenberg, treasurer for OU's SAE team, works on OU's car for the Formula SAE competition May 14-18.

SUMMARY

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