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OU's SAE team finishes 13th in world

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Experience and early preparation helped Oakland University's student affiliate of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) to its best-ever finish at the **2003 Collegiate Design Series Formula SAE** competition May 14-18 at the Pontiac Silverdome.

OU finished 13th out of 140 teams overall, outpacing last year's 123rd-place finish. In the individual events, OU finished sixth in the cost report, 12th in endurance and fuel economy, 16th in acceleration, 29th in the skidpad, 41st in the autocross and 43rd in design presentation. The University of Wollongong (Australia), which OU hosted for the second consecutive year, finished first overall.

"Our team's placement is really a significant achievement for such an intense competition," said Brian Sangeorzan, associate professor of engineering and OU SAE faculty adviser. "For a team relatively new to the competition, it's fabulous. If a team places within the top half, that's something to be proud of. Having to build a car completely from scratch in one year and finish as well as it did is quite an accomplishment for students who also hold full-time jobs."

Held annually since 1981, the Formula SAE is one of the top student engineering competitions in the world. Students must design, fabricate and compete with Formula-style racecars. The vehicles are judged in three separate categories: static inspection and engineering design, solo performance trails, and high-performance track endurance. Restrictions are placed on the car frame and engine to test the students' knowledge, creativity and imagination. Four-cycle engines up to 610cc may be turbocharged or supercharged to add to the challenge of engine design.

"As a team we are very excited by our performance," said Kevin Kolath, vehicle design manager and master's student in mechanical engineering at OU. "We were a lot more organized and started earlier in developing the new design. We also finished the car a little early so we were able to make some test runs and fix a few problems. Having already been through the competition last year also helped us be a little better prepared."

Kolath and about 15 core SAE members started working on the vehicle immediately after the 2002 competition. Three team members performed design work over the summer. The remainder of the students began actual vehicle construction last September. The students devoted many weekend hours to the project and finished a few weeks prior to the competition to allow for testing and tweaking the vehicle's performance. The finished racecar has a 2001 Honda CBR 600cc engine and weighs about 500 pounds without a driver. The vehicle also has 64 horsepower, which enables it to go from 0-60 miles per hour in 3.6 seconds.

"We received a certificate at the competition for finishing every single event," Kolath said. "With about 22 kilometers of racing involved, a lot of teams experience all kinds of breakdowns like overheating or component failures. We had to fix the front spindles of our vehicle and take care of a few other issues. But otherwise, we were really pleased with how the car ran for the actual amount of driving time."

OU's strong finish helped to increase its presence in international engineering circles, Sangeorzan said. Some of the international entrants in the competition were from Finland, Japan, Puerto Rico, the United Kingdom and Venezuela.

"This is a breakthrough year for our team and a lot of people know about us now," Sangeorzan said. "You can't just read about this competition, then show up and expect to do well. Our team was very hard working and finished a bit early so they could perform testing, which paid off in performance. I'm very proud of the way they performed and conducted themselves."

The OU SAE chapter won't rest on its laurels for long. Fund raising and design work for next year's vehicle will begin within the next few weeks, with the hopes of being able to complete the car even earlier for the 2004 competition. This year's vehicle cost \$12,000.

"The vehicles are pretty expensive, and we need sponsors to support us," Kolath said. "We'll soon start developing some different design improvements. The car will be similar but we can improve upon some things. The whole team is really proud of what we accomplished. We definitely hope to do even better next year."

For more information on the competition, visit the [2003 Collegiate Design Series Formula SAE](#) Web site. You also may view a [video clip](#) of the OU vehicle taken during the endurance competition.

SUMMARY

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