

MACOMB DAILY

Dakota students earn two first place awards at Autorama

The Scorpion vehicle took multiple years to complete

By Nicole Tuttle For MediaNews Group

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Dakota High School students in the design technology program and alumni of the program formed a team that recently earned two first place awards at Detroit Autorama.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAKOTA HIGH SCHOOL



A team of current Dakota High School students and alumni recently won first place in the Custom High School Class and first place in the Pro Custom Motorcycle Trike Class at Detroit Autorama.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DAKOTA HIGH SCHOOL

The Scorpion vehicle earned a team of Dakota High School students and alumni two first place awards at Detroit Autorama.

The Scorpion vehicle brought the sting of defeat to opponents competing against Dakota High School students and alumni on March 1 when it earned the team two first place awards at Detroit Autorama.

Both current and alumni students from the Macomb Township school's design technology program were part of a team that earned first place in the Custom High School Class and first in the Pro Custom Motorcycle Trike Class. Their vehicle, The Scorpion, is a custom motorcycle powered three-wheeler, 100 percent student designed and built. It was named for its unique design and students developed a logo for it as well.

"We have built some crazy projects, really unique and wild, just out of this world things," Dakota Design Technology Instructor Scott Mitchell said.

Mitchell said students "burned the midnight oil" for several months to prepare for the show. Although many contributed to the project and worked behind the scenes for the show, it was a team of about seven that spent five days at 2020 Detroit Autorama held at TCF Center in Detroit, the building formerly known as Cobo Center.

"There were quite a few of our kids that showed up at the event as well. Over the three day event, kids came on multiple days to hang around our booth. A lot of them have not been in an atmosphere like this before," Mitchell said.

The Scorpion project was started by students a few years ago, but ended up being back-burnered, Mitchell said. More recently another group of students lobbied Mitchell to allow them to resurrect the project and see it through. Having formerly worked in the engineering field, Mitchell informed students if they chose to do the project, they would need to work in a professional manner and build to quality. The design technology program involves hands-on applications of calculus, geometry and other math or science, Mitchell said.

"So what we do is design everything on a computer first, in a three-dimensional world. We analyze the math and science behind it. We always do it on a computer, then build it from scratch," Mitchell said, adding this includes welding and fabricating.

Students generally spend all four of their Dakota High years in the design technology program, with ninth graders beginning by designing smaller projects. The design aspect continues through the sophomore year, and juniors begin getting into engineering as well as designing larger projects. Seniors move into research and development, and it is at this stage that students begin to select their projects and vehicles come to fruition. Older students mentor younger students in the program, and alumni frequently return to mentor students as well, Mitchell said. He estimated about 95 percent of his students go on to study engineering post-high school.

"When the kids graduated, this project was not quite finished. As they were going to engineering school, most of them came back on the weekends or at night and finished it up, and mentored some of the younger kids as well. It was a collaborative effort," Mitchell said.

Eighteen-year-old Nathan Puma, a senior at Dakota, said The Scorpion took about two years to complete in the fall of 2019, primarily by a group of seven including seniors and alumni, Mitchell said. Corporate donors contributed funding for the project.

Alumni Tony Ciranni, age 19, said students and grads strove to achieve the "wow" factor with the vehicle.

"A lot of it was us getting that final look, that final of trying to wow people with it," Ciranni said.

New projects are currently in the works, but Mitchell saw so much potential in The Scorpion that he believed it should be entered not only in Autorama's Custom High School Class but also in the non-

high school class of Pro Custom Motorcycle Trike Class. He paid the fee for the students to enter this class, allowing them to compete against bike builders from across the country.

"Everybody walked by our display and looked at it and said, 'Man, that's cool,' Then they would see it was from a high school. No one could believe it," Mitchell said.

Students learned they had won first place in the two categories on March 1 during ceremonies. Mitchell attributes attention to detail as the key to the students' success.

"They are very passionate. Everything they do, they put in 100 percent, every single day," Mitchell said.

Ciranni said his Autorama experience taught him that excellence is always a matter of improvement.

"You can always do better, no matter how many hours you put into it, no matter how many hours you work, there is always room for improvement," Ciranni said.

Puma said that at Autorama, some of the teachers of these types of lessons were experienced adults.

"You learn a lot about character, a lot about how to talk to other people, especially people that are older than you," Puma said.

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