

SHOWROOM

JOURNAL

Student team has shot in fuel-efficiency event

by KATHY MATHESON
AP Writer

PHILADELPHIA—With the Detroit Three automakers struggling, a multimillion-dollar contest to create fuel-efficient cars is not just a lark for inventors—it could reveal the future of the industry.

More than 100 teams are vying to win the \$10-million Progressive Automotive X Prize for environmentally friendly, production-ready vehicles that finish a long-distance race and get the equivalent of at least 100 m.p.g.

An unlikely top prospect is a team of students from West Philadelphia. Relying on knowledge, experience and a small budget, they are set to take on big-name hopefuls like alternative car company Aptera and a group including

rocker Neil Young.

Popular Mechanics ranked the West Philly Hybrid X Team—one of only two high schools in the field—among the top 10 early contenders last year.

“Many people still see us as very serious competitors,” team director Simon Hauger said.

The teams have entered 136 cars in two categories, representing a variety of body types and 14 combinations of fuel sources. They run from Young’s team’s 1959

convertible Lincoln Continental to a futuristic, three-wheeled vehicle from Aptera.

The West Philly students are entering a pair of custom hybrid cars: a rather staid, four-door Ford Focus and a sexy Factory Five GTM Supercar sportster, which they are building from a kit.

They had a huge success with their last kit car, a sleek K-1 Attack sports coupe hybrid that went from 0 to 60 m.p.h. in 4 seconds -- but had enough fuel efficiency to win the Tour de Sol for green technology vehicles in 2005 and 2006.

The team’s expenses—at least \$70,000 so far in cars, parts and entrance fees alone—are covered mostly by a state grant and supplemented by generous supporters, bake sales and other fund-raisers.



West Philadelphia students Sowande Gay, left, Sekou Kamara, center, and Stepfon Kirkland tackle a Ford Focus for conversion to a hybrid. AP Photo by Matt Rourke

Gov. Schwarzenegger calls for stronger energy policy

by KIMBERLY S. JOHNSON
AP Writer

DETROIT—California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger says the US needs a clear energy policy so automakers can develop cleaner, more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Speaking at the Society Automotive Engineers 2009 World Congress last April 20, Schwarzenegger said Washington has failed to create an energy policy that would help automakers develop fuel-efficient or alternative fuel vehicles more quickly.

“Washington hasn’t been able to show any leadership in the last few years. It’s been very frustrating,” he said. “How can car manufacturers go and start changing their plans when there’s no goal?”

Schwarzenegger said the Obama administration is now working to create a vision for US energy policy. He said he has had conversations with federal officials and wants California to lead the country when it comes to setting low emission standards.

California, 13 other states and the District of Columbia want the federal government to let them enact more stringent standards than the federal government’s.

The states’ regulations would cut greenhouse gas emissions by 30 percent in new cars and trucks by 2016. A March 2008 decision prevents states from setting their own limits on greenhouse gas emissions from automobiles, but President Barack Obama has ordered the EPA to reconsider the ruling.

Schwarzenegger said the nation should have one set of emission standards, but he would not say whether California would be willing to loosen its requirements in favor of a consistent national standard.

“We’re marching forward and want to be an inspiration to the rest of the country and Washington,” he said. “Other countries are lowering their emissions levels. We need to be leaders in cleaning up our act.”

He also said he favors government efforts to help Detroit’s ailing automakers. He defended previous remarks in which he told the domestic companies to “drop dead.”

“That’s not what I said,” Schwarzenegger said. “I said, ‘Michigan get off your butt and introduce cars of the future.’”

The governor said General Motors Corp. and Chrysler LLC have an opportunity to survive and make progress in creating



Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger cleaner vehicles.

“I think the car companies need help and they should get help. Washington should be a partner in this,” he said. “I don’t think taxpayers mind if you do it the right way.”

The SAE World Congress is a four-day conference that focuses on research and development of vehicle components such as powertrains and exhaust systems, and materials such as metals and composites.

The annual event comes as automakers globally are experiencing a downturn in sales, as the recession keeps many consumers from making big purchases. Lower revenues are putting a pinch on research and development efforts at automotive companies and suppliers.

But SAE officials say despite the challenges facing the industry, it must forge ahead in creating new technologies for better, more efficient vehicles.

Schwarzenegger echoed those sentiments, adding that he’s a fan of the cars Detroit produces, including two Hummers that he owns. He turned one into a hydrogen vehicle and converted the engine of another to run on biofuels. He said vehicles like Hummers and SUVs shouldn’t be taken off the roads, but they should utilize different technologies to be more efficient and clean.

“There’s nothing wrong with the Hummer, it’s a great vehicle,” he said. “We need to get off of gas engines and on clean fuel engines.”

He also volunteered to be the first to film a television commercial—for free—promoting Detroit cars.

“Detroit is going to be back,” he said, eliciting chuckles for the reference to his famous line from the *Terminator* movies.

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