

Cal State LA team develops ultimate fuel-efficient concept vehicle

By Stacey Wang, Staff Writer
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It's three times smaller than any sedan and has a snout and three wheels. It's teeny tiny and looks like it would be part of a ride in an amusement park. But here it is, cruising at 25 miles per hour across the university parking lot: a futuristic concept car, one that could be showcased under the bright lights of any auto show.

The sleek, black vehicle is the creation of a Cal State Los Angeles team, including four San Gabriel Valley residents, and it is at the forefront of fuel efficiency: 1,092 miles to the gallon.

"Especially in this time of fuel prices, there's more of a focus on creating awareness about fuel efficiency," said Virgil Seaman, CSULA advisor and technology professor.

The vehicle, known as Super Eagle II, is made of a composite material that is pliable like fiberglass and weighs in at 120 pounds. It has taught its creators a thing or two about the environment and going green.

"The things I've learned, the experiences that I've been a part of and the overall scope of the project has been a lot of help," said Frank Almeida of Diamond Bar.

Almeida, captain of the team for the 2010 season, and the crew will enter two new concept vehicles for competition. The group plans to shave 50 pounds off the vehicle weight, hoping to get another 500 miles per gallon.

At the 2009 Society of Automotive Engineers Supermileage competition in Michigan earlier this year, Super Eagle placed third overall in national competition.

First place winner was Universit Laval in Quebec, Canada with 1,804 miles to the gallon. Still, third place was impressive.

"It's phenomenal how we came together," Almeida said.

With the environment in mind, the team has also displayed the Super Eagle as a means to educate young adults about the future of fuel efficiency; that included an alternative car exposition in Santa Monica last year.

"It helps people think for the future, and give them ideas of what we're doing and the knowledge we're getting to incorporate into the future," said former Super Eagle driver Neil Lau, Monterey Park, 23.

"The common things we see is smog and gas-guzzler cars out there," said Raymond Wu, Arcadia, 23. The Super Eagle and cars like it show "how we look at fuel-efficiency ... and to provide a better society," the mechanical engineer major said.

"As I started learning, I became more aware of the environment, and knowledgeable about technologies available and improving the environment by creating technology," said Lau.

The 2009 team dedicated many weekends and much free time to creating the award-winning, supermileage car.

"It's a great group of kids," Seaman said. "They're all working different schedules. It takes a lot of commitment on their part."

The 2009 Super Eagle II team includes Almeida, Samuel Samayoa, Bernardo Chavez, Brian Choi, Michele Choi, Beto Gomez, Mary Kiley, Lau, Sergio Mendez, Oscar Merchant, Chaumont Pham-le, Alhambra resident Marilyn Phen, Chris Reid, Vu Tran, Eric Younger, Wu and Tina Yu.

The first competition for the 2010 team will be in April.

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