



Cougar Baja Team cruises through Pittsburg, Kansas, next stop Peoria

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Cougar Baja team showed off its latest off-road vehicle during a Baja SAE (Society of Automotive Engineers) competition held May 25-28 in Pittsburg, Kan.

The team, comprising mostly engineering students, designed, funded, built and tested their vehicle in preparation for the collegiate race which includes teams from around the world. Their next competition will be held June 7-10 in Peoria.

The SIUE Cougar Baja team is a student organization within the School of Engineering. Participating students included Adam Brocksieck, a native of Quincy who earned a bachelor's in mechanical engineering in spring 2017, as well as mechanical engineering majors Tim Talbert, of Hebron, Tim Koehler, of Mt. Pulaski, Seth Kirchner, of Chillicothe, and accounting major Alexandra Turner.

“This year we did most of the design work in the fall semester, and we began building our car in January, 2017,” said Koehler. “Team members used their free time, as much as 40 hours a week, throughout the spring semester building the car and preparing the necessary documents for competition. Once the car was painted during finals week, we assembled it, tested it and prepared for our trip.”

“The Baja SAE events feature four days of competition,” added Brocksieck. “On day one, teams do an engine check and give a sales presentation on the cost of the prototype we have built. On day two, teams go through a technical inspection, give a design presentation to judges from Polaris and perform a brake check.

“Then, on day three, the dynamic events begin, including acceleration, a suspension and traction course, a tight maneuverability course and a sled pull event. Finally, day four features the big test with a grueling four-hour endurance race where the cars are placed on a course to test the strength and mechanical longevity of our vehicles.”

The SIUE Cougar Baja team is in its 11th year and continues to make adjustments and learn from past competitions to come back with a better, lighter, faster and more competitive vehicle.

“We begin by creating a 3D model of the chassis, suspension components and other items,” Kirchner explained. “We then take a pile of steel tubing and sheet metal and cut, bend, notch and weld the tubing together and assemble the rest of the components. In previous years, our teams have tried unique ideas like four-wheel drive, but now we’re focused on competing better with quality vehicles.”

The team eagerly awaits the completion of the School of Engineering’s Student Design Center, which they say will help them excel greatly.

“As members, we learn problem solving, communication, teamwork, and leadership skills that will prepare us for the workforce and build our resumes,” explained Turner. “The hands-on side of our organization builds off the skills we’re learning in the classroom and allows us to apply our knowledge in a real-life setting.”

“Employers look for students with experience, and many global companies hire students for internships and full-time positions on site during Baja SAE competitions,” added Talbert. “These companies know that the students attending these competitions have the hands-on experience that will make them a valuable asset from the start of their career.”

Multiple sponsors contribute to the success of the SIUE Cougar Baja team. A complete list is available on the team’s Facebook page.

Students pursuing any major or possessing any skill level are encouraged to join the SIUE Cougar Baja team. For more information, email cougarbaja@gmail.com.

The SIUE School of Engineering offers one of the most comprehensive and affordable engineering programs in the St. Louis region with eight undergraduate degrees, five master's degrees and two cooperative doctoral programs, all housed in a state-of-the-art facility. Students learn from expert faculty, perform cutting-edge research, and participate in intercollegiate design competitions. Companies in the metropolitan St. Louis area provide students challenging internships and co-op opportunities, which often turn into permanent employment. All undergraduate programs are accredited by their respective accreditation agencies.

Team members tested their vehicle as they prepared for their competition in Pittsburg, Kan.

