

Students, robots match wits with obstacle course

Detroit team among 11 participating in college competition.

By Nicole Bondi
The Detroit News

ROCHESTER — They have spent hours studying robotics in textbooks and classrooms.

But now, the students in the seventh annual International College Ground Robotics Competition at Oakland University are putting their knowledge to the ultimate test: They are trying to create a robot that can go along a track lined with orange-and-white traffic barrels. Whichever team's robot is the fastest wins a \$4,000 check.

Getting a robot ready for competition isn't easy. Just ask the team from the University of Detroit Mercy.

Eric Kerkmaz, a senior, worked frantically with his teammates Monday afternoon to clear up a last-minute glitch. "It doesn't look like we're going to in the time we have left," Kerkmaz said.

The Detroit team's robot, a modified wheelchair with a camera mounted on it, was built from scratch beginning in January, a late start for the college students entered in the contest.

The contest is good experience, said several students from the 11 universities in the United States, Japan and Canada that participated. Virginia Technological University sent three teams.

"A lot of people just go through school and graduate and they don't get the hands on experience," said Adam Morzos, a senior at the University of Colorado at Denver.

The hardest part of the project is working out all the programming kinks, several students said.

"You have so many different problems to work with as far as programming goes. Building it isn't hard," Ayo Dele, 20, said. His team comes from a university in China. "It involves a lot of different methods of programming."

The federal Tank Automotive and Armaments Center



Photos by Daniel Mears / The Detroit News

University of Alberta, Canada, students work on their entry, Polar Bear, before the seventh International College Ground Robotics Competition.

was one of the originators of this project, which has grown to include as sponsors the Society of Automotive Engineers and the U.S. Department of Transportation. The three-day event also includes a design competition, evaluated by the Society of Automotive Engineers. The winning team takes home \$1,000.

The University of Colorado at Denver appeared poised on Monday to take home its second trophy in two years. The 5-by-3-by-4 foot robot looks like a little white car, with two wheels in front that control the steering and one tiny wheel in back to stabilize it.

"It's an on-going project," Morzos said. "Every year, we continue and add to the robot, so that just improves it that much more. We just happened to have a really good design that we use right now."



Nectar, the entry from the Hosei University of Tokyo, made it through the Oakland University obstacle course in 4 minutes, 15 seconds.