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NKU students ready to race

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HIGHLAND HEIGHTS - Engineering students at Northern Kentucky University are looking to take on students from Purdue, the University of Kentucky and University of Louisville in an unlikely place - the race track.

NKU senior Jonathan Beach has formed a chapter of the Society for Automotive Engineers. The group is building a vehicle to race against other universities.

The vehicle they are building is called a mini-baja.

"It's a little bigger than a four-wheeler," said Beach. "That's what we're building right now and hopefully we'll expand to other competitions. We have to design it from the ground up meeting SAE specs."

Beach said the students aren't offered much guidance.

"We get a pile of steel and it ends up as a car," said Beach, a senior majoring in mechanical manufacturing engineering technology. "The only parts we buy and assemble is the safety harness belts, belts, the engine, brakes and calipers."

"We'll be making the roll cage, main suspension components and shocks, The bulk of the design work is in the roll cage and the suspension."

Beach said that self-interest drove him to form the group but his motivation has now grown.

"It originally started off me looking for a senior project and my adviser suggested this competition," he said. "But I realized everyone is surprised when I say I'm an engineering major at NKU. I hope to get the NKU engineering department some exposure. I want to start something and sustain something at NKU that can be carried on for years."

The group's second goal is to recruit new members - it currently has 10.

"We need 15 SAE members to be recognized by SAE International," Beach said. Membership is not limited to engineering majors.

"It's mostly engineering, but one guy is a criminal justice major but he works at a dealership. It's open to anyone who is interested in cars."

For Beach, the new group helps him satisfy another interest.

"Ever since high school I wanted to manage a motor sports team and this gives the opportunity to do that," he said.

As for who will be his driver: "Whoever works the most and been on the team longest drives it."

The team's first race will be the Baja SAE Carolina on April 8.

More information about the competition can be found at www.sae.org. Interested students can contact

Beach at beachj1@nku.edu.
