

Innovators to industry: Lead, follow or get out of the way



DAN MCCOSH

Each spring, the Society of Automotive Engineers celebrates the new crop of brainpower that is the future of this industry by the Society of Automotive Engineers. It is a series of engineering design contests for engineering students at the nation's universities, thus encouraging the kind of thinking, invention and creativity that all too often gets buried in some mammoth corporate bureaucracy once the kid gets a "real job."

I was invited to participate as a judge. I once saw a couple of weeks ago, a contest where the students were charged with designing a practical hybrid car — a vehicle that is powered by both an electric motor, an internal combustion engine, or combinations of both. This led to an award concept is not quite as crazy as it seems, since theoretically the result would allow the vehicle to emit zero pollution in urban areas, while retaining a high-efficiency, long-range motor for highway use.

Hybrids in general are the kind of Holy Grail design that is generally stuffed in a back room at Ford, Chrysler or GM, only to be

put on display at one of those "car of the future" shows. But nobody really takes them too seriously.

Except, it turns out, the kids that don't know enough to know it can't be done.

Maybe you have to be a refugee of higher education that was a kind of cross between Animal House and Apple Computers, as I was, to appreciate the astounding variety of ingenuity of the SAE contest entries that showed up at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn. Starting with sophisticated computer design, the kids built cars that ran — actually ran — on alternative fuels and complex electric-gas drivetrains.

Some even included solar-

powered ventilation.

Part of the game was to produce a truly practical car, a category that was won by a group from Southfield's Lawrence Tech — the school that is underneath my office window.

It should be noted at this point that Ford's advanced product group recently unveiled a show car that was assembled in slightly less than a year. These kids put together their hybrid entries in about the same time, but mainly were working on their own while carrying a full load of classes. Granted, the results were not always polished, but the technical expertise was mainly leading edge.

One entry's goal was to achieve 100 mpg under gasoline power and a 60-mile range under batteries alone.

One has to wonder just what happens to this kind of energy when it is swallowed up in the major auto companies. In a perfect world, it would come charging in, the old hands would clean up the rough spots and great cars would come pouring out.

Instead, I remember a friend I knew in college who, driven by his passion for cars, returned to school at the age of 24 and worked his way through design school while supporting a family. After graduation, he worked a couple of years then quit, disheartened af-

ter drawing nothing but door handles in a big studio.

Amidst all the current debate over trade, union contracts, lead time and consortia, I'm beginning to wonder if the biggest problem facing the industry today is how to stand out of the way and let the future happen.

Dan McCosh is automotive editor of Popular Science magazine. If you have a comment, question or suggestion concerning Auto Talk, write to Dan McCosh, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, 48150, or you can call him directly by dialing 953-2047, mail box number 1870, on a touch-tone phone.

MARKETPLACE

To place your business in the marketplace calendar, mail the information, including the business telephone number and address, to Business Editor, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150. Or bring the information off at your local Observer & Eccentric newspaper office.

Metalcutting tool manufacturer Valente, as a result of its sale by CTE Corporation to Cincinnati Milacron Inc. earlier this year, is now officially Valente Inc. Valente Inc., which observes its 50th anniversary this year, continues to be headquartered in Troy, with sales, service and manufacturing operations on five continents. The company provides indexable-insert turning, boring, milling and drilling tools and a diverse range of related products to primary manufacturers and their suppliers in the automotive, automotive components, aerospace, farm implement, heavy equipment, petroleum, railroad, mining and other industries. Valente was founded as Modern Tool in Detroit in 1943 as a specialty tool shop serving the automotive industry and its suppliers.

Avery-Dennison Automotive,

headquartered in Troy, has recently been named one of the recipients of the 'NUMMI Partnership Award' for outstanding supplier service to the automotive industry. The award is presented annually by New United Motor Manufacturing, Inc., the joint venture of Toyota and General Motors based in Fremont, CA, to those companies exhibiting excellent performance in such areas as quality and cost control.

USMaintenance Corporation announced today that it has been awarded the housekeeping contract for the 88,000 square foot Detroit Medical Center located in Novi, Michigan.

USMaintenance was awarded the contract based on their unique program specially designed to ensure the high quality cleaning necessary for medical facilities.

For the second year in a row, Southfield-based CME-KHBB Advertising, was awarded the distinguished Quality Excellence Award (QE) from Chrysler Corporation for the agency's overall achievements in the areas of merchandising, collateral, in the 1992 model year. CME-KHBB is

one of only two advertising agencies honored this year with a QE award.

The Quality Excellence Award recognizes outstanding supplier performance throughout the model year. Performance is measured in the categories of quality, delivery, price and technology/customer support. The criteria for winning a Quality Excellence Award will ultimately be the minimum requirement that all suppliers must achieve to continue to do business with Chrysler Corporation. CME-KHBB Merchandising designed and produced the 1990-1992 Chrysler Corporation Annual Reports, Jeep/Eagle Division catalogs, and other Jeep and Eagle merchandising materials.

In addition to also winning a Quality Excellence Award last year, CME-KHBB received a Pontstar Award, the highest supplier honor based on an even more demanding and corporate-wide performance level.

Troy-based Arbor Drugs, Inc., has been named "Pharmacy Chain of the Year" by Drug Topics magazine. The annual competition celebrates a different aspect of chain drug pharmacy each year. Arbor is recognized for main-

taining its commitment to pharmacy and other core drugstore categories, as well as its focus on technology. Drug Topics described Arbor as one of the most respected drug chains in the industry.

Business and commercial law firm Raymond & Dillon, P.C., in Southfield has announced it has changed its name to Raymond & Prokop, P.C., in conjunction with the departure of Joseph F. Dillon to another firm.

The 17-attorney firm now is named for John J. Raymond Sr., who founded the firm in 1948 and

remains of counsel, and R. Peter Prokop, the firm's administrative principal and chief executive officer for the last six years.

Firm principal Paul L.B. McKenney has assumed leadership of the international practice, and each of the firms seven other principals also remain.

Prokop's name was selected by the firm's principals in recognition of the firm's accomplishments under his leadership. Since his election as CEO in 1986, the firm has increased the number of clients and corresponding billable production by 76 percent.

Raymond & Prokop also an-

nounced it will consolidate its two Detroit-area offices within the next few months in Southfield. The firm had been maintaining two Michigan offices — in Southfield, where the majority of principals already are located, and in Detroit, where only Dillon, one other principal, one associate and a few support staff members are located.

Robinson Graphics has won an Excellence in Design award from the International Paper Company for its "consistently high standards of design in the creative use of printing papers."

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