The Tagliatela College of Engineering

Teaming Up for a Ride

In Mechanical Engineering's capstone course for 2006–2007, graduating seniors were given a platform to show off their talents. Their final project: a vehicle they built themselves. The students pedaled, pushed, and rode their way to the end of senior year.

Some did so with an eye on the environment. One team built a human-powered, recumbent bicycle-like vehicle similar to the velomobiles popular with commuters in Europe and the Pacific Northwest. Another created a human cogeneration, electric four-wheeled bicycle powered by a driver and a battery pack. Pedal the generator a little, go slowly. Pedal fast, move up to twenty-five miles per hour. Or don't pedal at all. The batteries will move the bicycle for you.

"It seemed appropriate to build the bicycle, seeing as Connecticut was one of the first states in the country to build bicycles," says Dr. Sam Daniels, an associate professor of Mechanical Engineering who taught the course. "Maybe we should look to one hundred years ago for answers to consumption problems."

Still, some students opted for high-powered, low-gas-mileage vehicles. Inspired by a national competition sponsored by the Society for Automotive Engineering, one team — its members working twenty-to-forty-hour-a-week jobs in engineering and taking a full course load — built a mini-baja vehicle, aka a dune buggy, powered by a donated aircraft engine.

Most of the universities that build mini-bajas have teams of thirty students. UNH's team had four.

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"We had to manage our time wisely," says Justin Lalomio '07, who is now working full time for Unilever in New Jersey. Each student worked about twenty-five hours a week on the vehicle, for a total of nine months. "I learned how to work on a team, brainstorm, and manage my time," Lalomio says. "After only a month of work after college, I have realized how useful these skills are."

Their dedication shows in the appeal of the University's Mechanical Engineering students to potential employers. "You can't get to senior year in Mechanical Engineering at the University of New Haven and not have companies offer you a job," Dr. Daniels says. ◆

From left to right, students Jeremy Beaudry, Christofer Oliveri, Anthony Delucia and Justin Lalomio surround Tagliatela College of Engineering Dean Barry J. Farbrother in the mini-baja vehicle they built