College Journalists Attend Special Event Sponsored by Ford

By Pradeep Sreekanthan

Two weeks ago, I participated in a program for college journalists sponsored by the Ford Motor Company.

Notebook

Thirty college journalists from around the United States and Canada spent a weekend at the Ford plant in Dearborn, Mich.

The event was a chance for students to see how cars are designed and built, and for Ford to obtain student input in their design and marketing efforts.

According to the program coordinator Bill Collins, the program was a "step in the process of bringing Ford before young people and prov- ing our interest in their ideas and concerns." It was also an opportunity for the students to see new Ford products and get an idea of the company's culture.

Ford paid for all of our expenses, including hotel and airfare, for a total cost of about $100,000.

Members of the Ford National Youth Council, a group of 11 college students who informally advise the company, also participated in the program.

"90210" star makes appearance

We first toured the historic Dearborn Assembly Plant, opened by Henry Ford himself in 1918. At the plant, we watched assembly workers construct one of the 811 Mustangs that roll off the assembly line each day.

We traveled into the future at the Design Center Showroom where several concept cars were on display. Several designs caught my eye, including the Profile sports car, the Ranger Sea Splash, a pickup special- ly made for the canoeing enthusiast.

Several of these vehicles are on display at the New England International Auto Show at the Bayside Exposition Center this week.

We also had the opportunity to test drive several new cars, including the new Mercury Mystique, the new Mustang, and my personal favorite, the Taurus SHO.

At the track, amateur race driver and "Beverly Hills 90210" star Jason Priestley and professional driver Bob Bondurant guided us through an extensive course on safe driving techniques.

At the Dearborn Proving Grounds, we watched a Taurus crash into a fixed barrier at an impact speed of 30 miles per hour. Although the vehicle seemed to be moving very slowly, it was enough to completely destroy the car's front end. Ford uses these tests to evaluate the survivability of their vehicles in emergency situations and improve safety in their products.

Another highlight was the alternative fuel vehicles being developed at Ford's Scientific Research Laboratory. Engineer Beth Arcianda introduced us to the Ecostar, which is a zero emission electric car. This small, front wheel drive delivery vehicle is not available to the average consumer. However, it is currently being tested internally by Ford and by fleet customers.

Ford's Flexible Fuel Vehicles, also under development at the laboratory, can run on different compositions of gasoline and ethanol or methanol. At the heart of these cars are sensors that detect the percentage of ethanol or methanol in the fuel and adjust the fuel flow and spark timing accordingly. The natural gas vehicles were also available for test drives, but I was dismayed by the lack of power.

The weekend was packed with other events, including a financing and leasing seminar, a recyclability presentation, a dummy-lab tour, and a pleasant trip to downtown Detroit.

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For information or an application, contact: Dean's Office, School of Humanities and Social Science, E51-234 (x3-8961) or the HASS Information Office, 14N-408 (x3-4443).

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