





Spotlight on Students

Mini Baja is tackling new terrain

The Northeastern Mini Baja team is on a roll. After nearly being forced to close its doors in 2004, the team is now on solid ground and gaining momentum in terms of fundraising, competition, and professionalism.

Northeastern Mini Baja is one of about 250 college teams around the world that competes in events sponsored by the Society of Automotive Engineers. Students build cars to handle a range of challenging terrains and then race them on a motor-cross track in the Midwest, a rock climb in the West, and an amphibious course in the East. This year for the first time, the Northeastern team participated in all three U.S. events, placing in the top 10 in two of them. "Our main goal is to build a car that wins," says cocaptain Benjamin Davies, '07. "But we also want to legitimize the program for future students, so there will be no threat that it will be shut down."

Helping them achieve stability is an influx of private donations, most notably from Davies' co-op employer, Bose Corporation. "I worked at Bose for three co-ops," he says. "In one of my groups, I took a Baja approach. My supervisor was impressed." The Baja approach, Davies says, goes a step beyond the normal co-op experience. "In co-op, you can work on a computer and do some analyses, but you still lose out on the real hands-on experience," he says. "In Baja, you do all the machining and you do the testing. You know what to do if something breaks."

Vice president of manufacturing Bryan Fontaine, MS '82, MBA '87, liked the hands-on approach and took an interest in Baja's ability to help fledgling mechanical engineers hone their skills. His interest led to a donation to purchase all the parts and materials needed for a new car. This year, in response to a proposal from the team, Bose is purchasing a new racing trailer to transport the car. The trailer will be decked out with Northeastern and Bose logos and will feature Bose sound systems inside and out so the crew can listen to music as it works on the car. On the practical side, the team figures it will save \$6,000 a year in truck rentals and other costs associated with travel.

"A huge thing about the team is that it prides itself on being very independent," Davies says. "We motivate ourselves to get things done. The trailer is a part of that. It will make it easier for the team to do what it needs to do to compete in the future." For more information on Mini Baja at Northeastern, visit www.numotorsports.com.