CCE race car team gets taste of FI

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE: Caledonian Team Oryx hopes to be the first GCC college to participate in the Formula SAE student competition, in which they will design and build a race car. —Supplied photo

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MUSCAT: Caledonian Team Oryx, the innovative students from the Caledonian College of Engineering (CCE), who are making a competitive race car, visited the Silverstone F1 circuit in England this month and returned more inspired than ever to make their car a reality.

Team leaders Shamla Al Kindi, Essam Al Muqdad, Haitham Al Saqri, Mutassim Al Saqri, Maitham Al Orabi and Togay Yuvanc spent five days at the track where they attended the Formula SAE (Society of Automotive Engineers International) student competition, in which they hope to compete next year. The students were accompanied by Jenny Walker, Associate Dean for Professional Development at CCE.

"The whole purpose of going was because you read about these things in theory but you can't get a true sense of the whole scale of the enterprise until you go there," Jenny said, adding that CCE paid for the entire trip as a means of supporting its students.

Over the five days there the team got to meet some of the teams from the 120 universities who were participating in the competition. They spoke with them about the strengths and weaknesses of their designs, taking all their new knowledge away for when they begin building their car later this year.

"The main purpose of the trip was to look for answers to the doubts we had in terms of making the project as clear as possible and to make it as easy as possible for us, since it's our first time," said Haitham, the main team leader.

Visiting the competition made the students' project seem like more of a reality rather than an endless pile of paperwork. They could see that the paperwork would pay off in the end, Haitham explained.

All-round performance

The students learned that the competition isn't just about making the car and seeing how fast it goes, but also about time management and logistics, too. They have to ensure the car can pass customs, that they can get the required visas, that each of the students, regardless of their position on the team, understands the car and the team inside and out, and that they can get sponsors for the project, without which it would be nearly impossible.

"I discovered I should know everything," said Mutassim, assistant mechanical leader. He said he and all the team members need to know what each other's role is and understand the mechanics and business aspects of the car.

Caledonian Team Oryx found out that teams from other universities think of their cars as vehicles that can potentially be sold to customers, so the competition is also like being in the automotive industry, the students found out.

"We are basically a virtual company," said Togay, the designer.

The team leaders said they want to make a race car that is affordable for Oman's youth, but also one that has safety as the top priority, and that can be driven on a local race track so those who want to race can do so without harming others on the roads. "Ninety percent of the regulations are based on safety," said Togay, talking about the competition rules.

Shamla, the marketing leader, was also impressed by the number of women in the competition, including drivers. She said people here had questioned why a woman would be involved in making a race car, but seeing women on many of the teams inspired her.

"When I went there and saw many females in the teams, I thought I could do this and prove to people here there are women out there doing it," Shamla said.

The students also confirmed that they'll be the first college from the GCC to participate in the Formula SAE student competition, assuming they get the sponsorship they need to go all the way. Building a race car and attending the competition will require help from the community, the team said.

"The key now is to get sponsorship. It might be small change for big companies, but for us it will make all the difference," Jenny said. "We desperately don't want it to stop here. The team has a chance of doing pretty well, especially if we get that sponsorship."

Attending the Formula SAE student competition at Silverstone Circuit energized and inspired Team Oryx, who are now looking ahead to the next steps, which include getting more financial support and building the car.

"We were lucky to be there as observers," concluded administrative leader Maitham.