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TOP TEAM: The winning crew from Georgia's Institute of Technology.

Picture:
BRENTON EDWARDS

Students design winning formula

THE future leaders in automotive engineering have been glimpsed at Tailem Bend as students from all over the world competed in cars they have designed and built themselves. The Australian Formula Society of Automotive Engineering (Formula SAE) competition, held outside of Victoria for the first time, was won by a US team from the Georgia Institute of Technology (GIT).

"When companies see you've got Formula SAE on your resume, you get really good job offers," says Scott Flanagan, Georgia Institute team leader.

"It's all for the experience and it's such a unique opportunity for students to take their design on paper all the way to manufacture, build it, test it and race it."

The American team beat a strong field from Japan, Sweden and Germany, as well as a number of Australian teams.

The teams of 20 students have to design, build, drive, finance and promote single-seater autocross racers on a \$50,000 budget, as though they are working in real-world automotive manufacturing. A test that has seen most of the graduates involved secure employment in the automotive industry.

The Formula SAE competition, organised by the Australasian Society of Automotive Engineers, was staged over four days at Mitsubishi's proving ground near Tailem Bend. The short-wheelbase, wide-track open-wheelers are built using a Honda CBR600

engine and gearbox with low-weight stressed carbon panels to increase chassis strength and rigidity, giving the cars 0-100km/h potential of around four seconds.

The GIT team scored 891 out of a possible 1000 points to win the prize, ahead of other high-scoring teams from the Chalmers University in Sweden, the University of Queensland and the University of Wollongong.

Mitsubishi president Tom Phillips says the performances were a testament to the dedication of the teams involved.

"The cars these teams have put together this year are really exciting and demonstrate how much this competition has helped auto-engineering students," he says.

"Mitsubishi has a strong belief in the value of hands-on experience as part of the education process."

Last year, Mitsubishi hired eight engineers involved in the competition and Robert Chadwick, Mitsubishi's manager of special projects and event clerk of course, says Formula SAE was an industry hunting ground for talent and designs.

"The students who've done this, we rate them as being about 18 months to two years ahead of their fellow students," he says.

Stuart Martin and Maria Moscaritolo