

Williams students speed into Top 3 in International Auto Show competition



By Brock Weir

Ethan Chan and Lachlan Cooper had a game plan when confronted with a broken-down car.

They knew there were multiple things wrong with it, but when tackling it their first goal was just to get the car to turn on and then to fix the rest of the problems later.

That was the key to their success last month as they came home with third prize in the 15th annual Toronto Automotive Technology Competition, hosted by Centennial College and held at the Canadian International Auto Show.

The competition brings together duos of students from across Ontario to diagnose and repair collective problems in cars, not just to beat the clock, but also to get the job done right.

Last year, Ethan and Lachlan placed 12th, but they went into this year's competition determined to bring home a cup.

"We just knew what we messed up on last year and knew what to do this year," says Ethan, noting they were going to have to work their magic finding out what was wrong with a Volkswagen Passat. "We went to Pfaff Volkswagen [in Newmarket] and brushed up on the diagram."

Adds Lachlan: "There were a lot of electrical problems and things disconnected, fuses blown and things like that, and we want to walk through the procedures. We had two hours on a car and 20 minutes to solve each issue. You just have to know how to do it!"

Students taking part in the competition are put through their paces in two practice sessions at Centennial College where they take a closer look at subjects they could encounter in the heat of the competition. Keeping all these lessons in mind, however, students need keen focus in the arena.

"You have to keep focused on what you're doing," says Lachlan.

Adds Ethan: "You don't want to pay attention to other people --- that is how you lose track of yourself."

With each problem they fixed, the students had to properly document and record exactly how they solved the issue. They were each given a guide, but it did not say what specifically needed to be done to get the car up and running again.

"Getting it to start was probably the hardest part," says Ethan.

?We weren't sure where to start,? interjected Lachlan.

?A quarter of the way through we just knew something was wrong with our computer but we couldn't figure out why,? Ethan continued. ?It's a bit different than in the workplace because you don't have to deal with so many electrical components, but this competition at least gives you an idea of what you need to do to get down to it. If I have a customer coming in, I should be able to follow through like this instead of just trying to play genie.?

Throughout the year in the Dr. G.W. Williams auto-shop, and at last month's competition, the students are supervised by teacher Tom Walch. Ethan and Lachlan said their strategy of just getting the car running first was a good one, noting they did the things they knew how to fix right off the bat before tackling the harder components.

Coming home from Toronto, they brought with them their winnings of hundreds of dollars-worth of tools and books, a battery charger, and are awaiting the ultimate prize of a new GM vehicle to be used as a learning aid in the shop.

?These [auto-shop programs in schools] are invaluable to students,? says Mr. Walch. ?We have had so many kids go through here using what they learned in these programs and have applied them to their next career. We have had design students who have built fantastic pieces.

?In this shop, success to me is when kids can go out and get a job. A number of them have gone on to work at Toyota, GM or Ford. Co-op experiences at this school are fantastic and have supported our students in more ways than we believed possible and for the boys here sometimes it is tough for them to sit down and do something academic. It is a lot easier if it is something hands-on and learning by doing.?