CONCOURS PROJECT UPDATE: MB 300S

Bob Lapane works with students on the 300 S rear axle assembly.

Students + Alumni + Industry

AUTOMOTIVE RESTORATION

Taking on a vehicle restoration project is always challenging. However, taking on a frame-off restoration project with the goal to compete at Pebble Beach may be the ultimate challenge. Students at McPherson College are stepping up to this challenge and getting hands-on experience restoring a 1953 Mercedes-Benz 300 S.

It's not so much about the reward at the end of this project, as most of the students won't be at McPherson College when the vehicle is ready to show in 2023. For many students, the rewards are found in the journey of the process. This year the vehicle provided in-depth senior capstone projects for four students and brought an industry professional with 50 years of experience to campus for lectures and demonstrations.

"Students are able to see and work with engineering and processes we wouldn't normally be able to show in an education setting," Brian Martin, director of automotive restoration projects, said. "We aren't just showing students how this can be done but showing them the very best of how this can be done."

Either in class or special work sessions, all students had the opportunity to work on various components this year including trim, drive train, engine, paint and metal fabrication. A team of five students, selected from applicants at the beginning of the year, were hired to work on the project and make sure that it continues to progress.

Certainly a highlight this year was guest lecturer Bob Lapane's visit to campus. Lapane, who works with Paul Russell & Company, has 50 years of experience rebuilding exotic vehicle drive trains. He presented a lecture and demonstrated assembly of the vehicle's rear axle. Matt Nutting, one of the students on the project team, worked on disassembling and repairing the rear axle.

"To be able to say that I had a hand in rebuilding a rear end for a 1953 Mercedes with Bob Lapane is something not many people can say," Nutting said. "Having the help of someone like Mr. Lapane to support the program and visit campus helps keep the trade alive and pass down years of knowledge and experience to new hands. I am grateful to have worked alongside him."

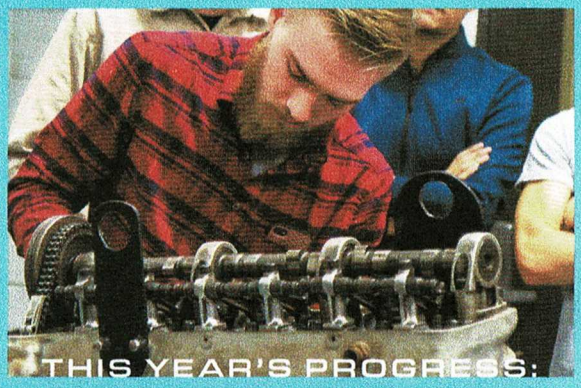
Along with support from experts, the project has received support from others through donations. Last spring, Aeristo, a Dallas company that

is the leading supplier of high-end leathers for companies around the world, donated nine leather hides for the interior components of the vehicle. Aeristo specializes in sourcing leather that is produced as it was years ago for restoration projects.

Michael Dudley, assistant professor of technology, worked with experts to find the original sample books for the interior. It was important to find leather as close to the original as possible, he explained. Students in his advanced trim classes made significant progress this year on the interior.

Aeristo founder and CEO Christian Schmidt is excited about being part of the restoration project. "In our industry, we feel there is a void in the market for talented restorers. Handcrafted leather skills are becoming a lost art, and we want to support any organization or school that is helping to teach these skills to the next generation. It is tremendously important for our industry."

Others have supported the project this year as well, including the Mercedes-Benz Club of Wichita.



THIS YEAR'S PROGRESS:

- *metal fabrication, including repairing rocker panel, repairing rust throughout and slight collision damage in rear bumper and trunk. Four students took on various aspects for their senior project in sheet metal;*
- *interior, including making patterns, completion of sewing leather for rear seat, and beginning work on front seat;*
- *suspension and brake systems rebuilt;*
- *beginning work on engine bay components;*
- *assembled rear axle;*
- *disassembled and cataloged engine;*
- *painted suspension and brake components.*

PROJECT SUPPORTER:

The 300 SL Foundation is committed to encouraging the development of technicians with the skills and interest to care for the Mercedes-Benz marque. With proceeds from their 2018 Mercedes-Benz 300 SL Classic event, the Foundation will generously fund one full year of student project team wages on the college's Mercedes-Benz 300 S and also provide internship support for three students working with experts in a Mercedes-Benz related shop this summer.

"We've had good experiences as we've met McPherson College graduates at automotive events around the country," said Thomas Thornhill, board member. "The Foundation wants to ensure that students continue to be a valuable resource for the car community."