



Dana White / Lariat staff

Patrick Cowhig, a Sherman junior, and Rene Palacios, a Waco senior, prepare to release their teams' robots in the drag racing event of the first Engineering 3336 class robot challenge.

Class puts robots to test

Teams' machines compete in drag racing, dancing

By Dana White
Staff writer

Drag racing, motocross and dancing usually don't take place in the Robert M. and Louise Rogers Engineering and Computer Science building, but Thursday morning students from a microprocessor systems computer engineering class brought those activities to the hallway of the engineering school.

Technically, the students (for the most part) refrained from dancing, but the robots for which they designed pro-

grams certainly cut a rug to songs like "The Hokey Pokey" and "That Good Old Baylor Line."

The competition began as the brainchild of Dr. Steven Eisenbarth, associate dean of the engineering school.

"I planned to integrate this when I was scheduled to teach the EGR 3336 class," Eisenbarth said.

When Dr. Brian Garner was assigned to teach the class instead of Eisenbarth, he shared the idea with his colleague.

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Programming robots harder than expected

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"It's pretty nifty," Eisenbarth said with a smile after his duties as judge for the dance competition were complete. "I think this is the second dance on the Brazos."

"This was definitely something new for the students," said Garner, assistant professor of engineering. "They were required to incorporate several

concepts they had learned and implement some teamwork and problem solving skills."

The students wrote and loaded programs onto a Handspring palm operating system in order to control a Deluxe Brainstem PPRK robot using programming techniques they had learned in the course.

The process took students about a week to complete, Sean Chu, a junior from Taipei, Taiwan, said.

According to Chu, programming the robots to race was the most difficult portion of the assignment because of the difficulties involved in making the robot's sensor work.

The competition was fierce, but friendly with mercy shown to those who fell victim to false starts, technical difficulties and dirty floors.

"It was actually fun to get to see something we've worked so hard on implemented," Kristin Kirsch, a Houston senior, said.

Eisenbarth said the students would benefit from interacting with hardware systems and have a little fun in the process.

"The level we've seen today is not rocket science," he said.

The competition ended with team Hobbit winning with a total score of 289 points.

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