Schools Promote Research As Auto Industry Boost

David Runk, Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — Researchers from the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University have been showing how their combined efforts have contributed to some of the technological advances on display at this week's Detroit auto show.

The schools and their researchers have contributed to improvements in safety, performance and fuel economy with more than $300 million in auto-related research projects over a five-year period, officials with the state's University Research Corridor partnership said.

During a tour of the North American International Auto Show, Wayne State University engineering professor Jerry Ku said the gap between academic and industry research has narrowed in recent years.

"We are very, very aligned. Same direction," said Ku, whose research deals in part with electric vehicle battery packs.

Ku said vehicles such as the Nissan Leaf electric car, the Chevrolet Volt plug-in and Toyota's Prius hybrids also serve as inspiration when coming up with ways to teach about the latest industry advances. He said students are asked to look at how the technology for such vehicles is developed and selected.

A report last year by East Lansing-based Anderson Economic Group that was commissioned by the URC said the schools had more than 1,400 auto-related research projects from 2007-2011.

Additional projects are under way, and the schools note that they each year produce more than 3,600 science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates. Many of those who stay in the state end up working in the automotive industry.

"It is a huge magnet for talent. There is huge demand for that," URC executive director Jeff Mason said of research and development work in the state.

The URC is working to promote research efforts in Michigan along with MICHauto, which was set up by the Detroit Regional Chamber to boost the auto industry.

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