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NEWS

'It's a spaceship': Auto industry enthusiast brings Hummer EV to East high school automotive students

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On Monday morning at the East Community Learning Center's Automotive Technology Center, Mike Wiant was revved up like a stock car at Barberton Speedway on a Saturday night.

The Bath Township resident had his hands on a 2022 Hummer EV, and in a few minutes would give a presentation to students in the automotive program at the school. He was still exploring its features, praising Randolph-based Sarchione Auto Group for lending him the "beast" and itching to use the vehicle's launch mode.

"It's unbelievable," he said. "It's a spaceship. You feel like you're getting into a rocket."

Student builders: 'A hammer in my hand': Barberton, Copley, Norton and Wadsworth students build a house

For the last four years, Wiant has been showing extreme vehicles to students at high schools in the Akron area, trying to spark interest in the products many will be working on. It's part of what he calls a mission, made possible by his job at auto industry giant Shelby American.

"If you want to get kids excited about the industry, show them the product," he said.

Wiant, who's worked for dealerships and Ford Motor Co. in the past, said dealerships and the wider industry have an ongoing demand for skilled workers, who are always in short supply. Students who decide to become an auto technician or other positions in the industry will find doors open quickly for them, he said.

"There's a huge demand for skilled trades," he said. "A huge demand for automotive technicians."

A souped-up Hummer EV like the one Wiant showed off this week runs about \$200,000, he said. A more basic version runs about \$100,000, according to a June CNBC report, but inflation pressures are pushing that number higher and higher. The vehicle has 1,000 horsepower and can go from zero to 60 mph in three seconds.

It has a hands-free cruise control option that can pull the vehicle to the side of the road in case of a medical emergency and a crab-walk mode in which all four wheels line up when turning. It displays the G-force passengers feel in launch mode.

"Welcome to the future," Wiant said. "The future is here."

At about 11:30 a.m., Wiant drove the Hummer into the Automotive Technology Center service bay, where the program's 54 students work on vehicles to prepare for a career many will enter. Some, though, are in the program for other reasons. One student told Wiant she's in the program "so I don't get overcharged."

Automotive Tech teacher Chris Madrigal said career path or otherwise, the program develops practical skills that can be applied anywhere.

"The knowledge of how to fix something doesn't mean only cars," he said.

Students can use what's learned to fix appliances around the house, he said. Recently, for instance, he repaired one at his home with a \$2 part that kept him from having to make a major purchase.

Students immediately gravitated toward the parked Hummer, sizing up its exterior, the — two — dashboard displays inside and the undercarriage.

Quan Wilson, 18, a senior, said he's a big fan of old and new cars, with the 1987 Buick Grand National his favorite vehicle from the past. His interest extends to the all-electric vehicle on display in his classroom.

"I've been keeping up with the new Hummer," he said.

David Boyle, 17, a senior at East who's going into the U.S. Marines, said his background includes working on vehicles since he was young. He took an analytical approach to the Hummer EV.

"It has a lot of torque and a lot of horsepower," he said. "I prefer the gas and diesels (but) the technology is interesting."

Despite his preference for gas-powered cars, Boyle said it's important for students to learn about EVs.

"There's a lot more out there, so anyone working in the automotive field should know how to work on electric vehicles," he said.

Teacher training: Why Akron's K-1 teachers are spending 60 hours learning about the science of reading

Auto technicians in high demand

In his presentation, Wiant stressed the financial benefits that can accrue for dependable auto technicians.

"Every dealership out there is struggling for auto technicians," he said. "On the service side as a mechanic, there's a dream job out there."

Community colleges have two-year programs that are often subsidized and can leave a student fully certified with a job waiting on graduation day, he said.

"Do you have to go to college to get in the industry?" he said. "No, but it helps."

He told student he could be contacted through Ohio Tech Group on the [ohiotechgroup](#) Instagram page, which Wiant uses to encourage students wanting to go into the field.

"I want to give you hope that this industry is awesome," he said.

Wiant showed an image of a disassembled vehicle engine on-screen, talking about the skill it takes to put the pieces back together and the value the industry places on such skills.

"It blows me away what some of you can do," he said.

Move toward electric vehicles is historic shift in auto industry

He stressed the importance of understanding electric vehicles as that segment grows as a share of sales. The shift to electric is rare and historic in the industry, he said.

"What's happening in the automotive industry would probably happen once every 100 years," he said.

Madrigal said he expects the program to gradually shift, too.

"I definitely would expect the EV to become part of the program," he said.

As such, Monday's presentation was a sign of things to come, he said.

"This is huge because we don't have full electric vehicles in our shop," he said. "Having a full EV that's brand new really shows them where it's headed."

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EV facts

As of 2021, electric vehicles represent an increasing share of the U.S. market.

In March 2021, electric vehicles accounted for 7.6% of new car sales.

There were 25,313 charging stations in the U.S. by the end of 2020.

There are 10 million EVs on the road.

122,016 EVs were sold in March 2021 setting sales records.

Source: Bankrate