KHS/Delco invention ready for contest

Come see their creation in action at a sneak preview performance today

By TRISHA TURNER
Tribune staff writer

What's round, throws rubber balls with a 6-foot arm and is headed for Florida?

It's H2Kat, and it will represent Kokomo High School and Delco Electronics Corp. in a national competition next month.

H2Kat, standing for Hurryin' Hoosier Kat or Kat Acid — Don't Add Water, is a vehicle designed and assembled by KHS pupils and teachers and Delco engineers for the 1995 U.S. FIRST contest in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

The local group, KHS FIRST, is Indiana's lone representative for the event that brings students and corporations together to hone technology skills.

And they want the public to get a sneak preview of what they've been working on since January by coming to an open house set for 2 to 4 p.m. today at Lincoln School.

The plan is for the team to display its contest vehicle, H2Kat, in action on a model playing field with a second, practice machine. The open house is free to the public and will be conducted in the school gymnasium.

"We want the people to see what the kids are doing and how proud we are of them," said Jack Davidson, teacher and KHS FIRST sponsor.

FIRST (For the Inspiration cognition of Science and ogy) is in its fourth year, th a different theme and e for its participants. re sent materials and a list that may be purchased to e a remotely controlled or the competition.

machines compete each other on playing fields that vary each year.

This year's national contest, "Ramp & Roll," is from March 30 to April 1 at Walt Disney World/Epcot '95. It calls for three teams to start on a carpeted, T-shaped playing field 40 feet long and use their vehicles to pick up 24-inch and 30-inch balls and put them over a 5-foot goal post on the other end of the field.

Along the way, the machines must maneuver tight spaces, ramps and a speed bump. Points are awarded to teams according to the size and number of balls their vehicles place over the goal.

KHS FIRST's remotely controlled vehicle is about 36 inches in diameter and stands more than 6 feet high with its aluminum arm completely extended. At the end of the arm is plastic tubing designed to hold the rubber balls.

H2Kat has four wheels and is operated by 12-volt batteries and drill and power seat motors.

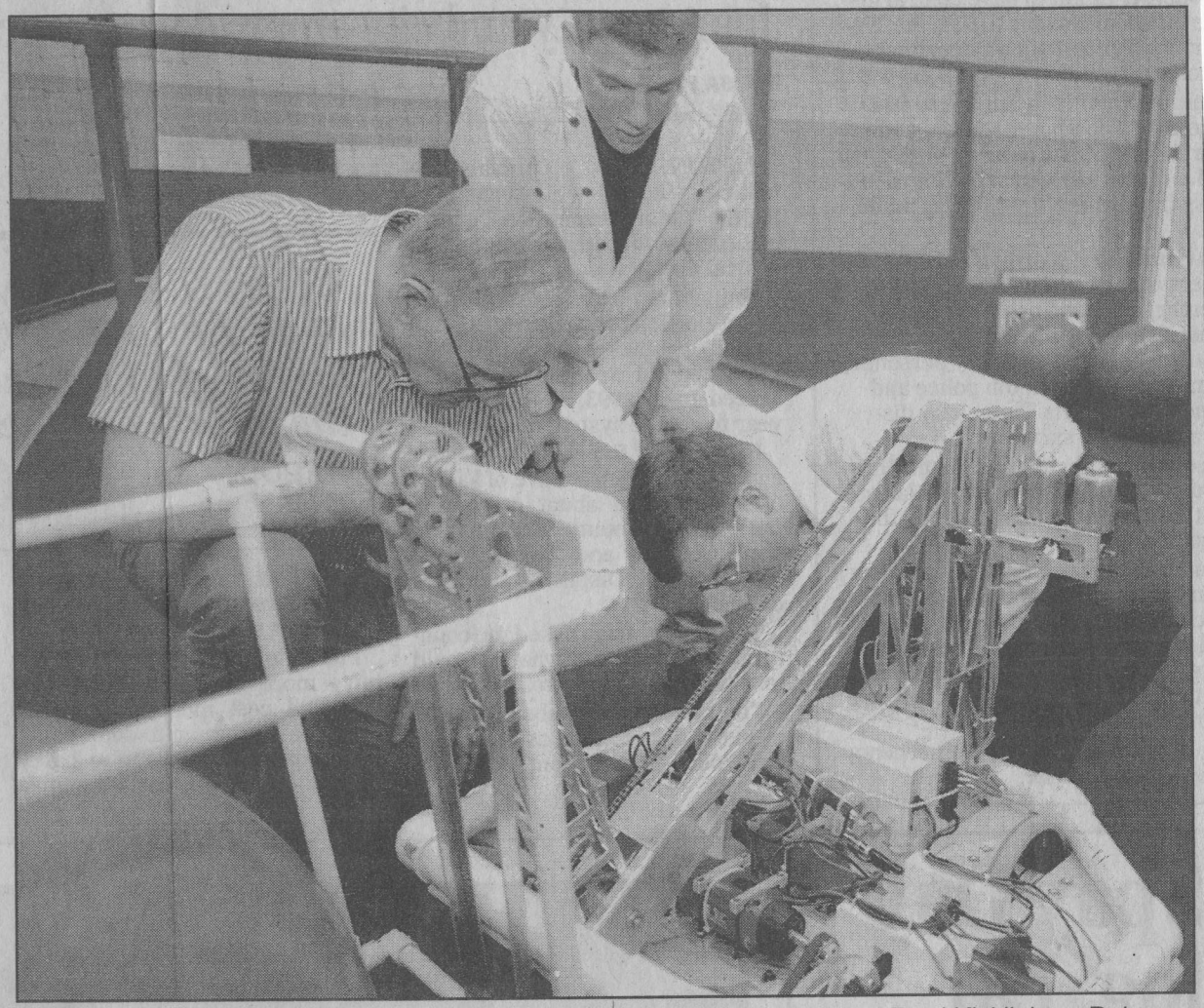
Nineteen pupils — including eight guests from Northwestern High School — will fly to Florida with two KHS teachers, a Northwestern teacher and four Delco engineers. Financed partly through fund-raising projects, the trip will be from March 29 to April 3.

Two of the KHS students will be selected to run the remote control for the vehicle during the national contest.

The Delco-KHS team has been involved in each year's U.S. FIRST contest, with its best showing coming in 1992's "Maize Craze" event. The team took third place among 17 teams that year, but this year's participants number nearly 60.

Local team leaders like their chances for finishing well in "Ramp & Roll."

"If Murphy's Law doesn't get us, we'll be OK," Davidson said.



KHS teacher, Jack Davidson, left-right, NHS sophomore Brent Graber and Brad Kicklighter, Delco photographer who is chief electrical engineer on the project, work on "H2Kat." (KT photo by Joshua Ho[illegible]son)

Max Davies, Delco test engineer, said the group is eyeing another award as well — the Chairman's Award, which is given to the team that best spreads the message of learning supported by U.S. FIRST.

"My personal goal is to encourage kids to think, to create a sense of wonder, to encourage divergent thinking and to develop and encourage greater problem-solving skills," Davies said. "And I think they've responded well."

The Delco-KHS team started engineering projects in the fall, working on the U.S. FIRST competition nearly every day since early January. But the pupils said the contest is worth the hours put into it.

"It's been fun," said senior Roy Griffin III, who opera[illegible] team's vehicle in the na[illegible] petition last year. "Ar[illegible] develop skills for how t[illegible] a project, teamwork [illegible] been a collective effort