

Can you canoe? UAH can do it best

Concrete canoe team paddles to regional title

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"Smooth," "fast" and "high-tech" may not be the first words that come to mind when you think of "concrete," but all describe the University of Alabama in Huntsville concrete canoe team's 2006 craft, "Full Spectrum."

Team members recently paddled the 21½-foot, 162-pound boat to a commanding first-place finish in last month's American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) Southeast Regional Concrete Canoe Competition. It was the 14th regional championship for UAH's ASCE chapter since it began competing in 1988.

UAH took the title by more than 23 points ahead of second-place Florida Institute of Technology.

"It was really quite a surprise," said Dr. Housam Toutanji, co-adviser of the team with Dr. John Gilbert.

UAH will try for an unprecedented sixth national championship at the ASCE National Concrete Canoe

Competition at Oklahoma State University on June 15-17.

Students began preparing for the competition in September, Toutanji said. They spent months in physical training with previous years' canoes on the lake in front of the university while designing and building the 2006 entry.

To look at it, you would never guess "Full Spectrum" is made of concrete. Its shiny, thin, slick, multicolored hull has been handcrafted with a high-tech formula of flexible concrete, layers of graphite mesh and other materials.



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University of Alabama in Huntsville engineering students, from left, Patrick Pape, Annette Wilson-Fisher and Shannon Ward clean a mirror for their concrete canoe display last month at the University of Florida.

The competition rules restrict how much water, aggregate and other substances can be used in the concrete formula, Toutanji said. From the outside, this year's canoe looks about the same as the others. But if you cut into a cross-section, it would reveal very different layers.

"It is a great boat in so many ways," he said. "It is not heavy but it is not light."

Too light and the canoe would not be steady; too heavy and it would be more difficult for paddlers to move it through the water.

But there's much more to the competition than racing: 75 percent of the overall

score comes from judging of the overall quality of the craft and for the team's design report and presentation. During the 2006 regional competition at the University of Florida, UAH finished first for its final product and design report and second in presentation.

Toutanji said nearly every school brings a good boat. It takes a combination of engineers, athletes, managers and others to win.

Annette Wilson-Fisher, a junior, is president of the ASCE chapter, project man-

Want more?

On the Net:

UAH's chapter of the American Society of Civil Engineers hosts a Web site with information about the team and sponsors, the concrete canoe competition, its history and many links to competing schools:
www.uah.edu/student_life/organizations/ASCE



Special to The Times

Members of the University of Alabama in Huntsville concrete canoe team are seen with their entry, "Full Spectrum," after taking first place in regional competition at the University of Florida.

Canoe

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er for "Full Spectrum" and one of the team's three female paddlers. She said they brought in experts and advisers, alumni from previous teams, faculty members and athletic coaches to help. They worked on team dynamics and personalities,

identifying individual strengths and how they all interact.

"We really wanted to win – a lot – this year," she said.

In addition to high scores in the design and presentation areas, UAH outraced 19 other schools – including Auburn University, the University of Alabama, the University of Tennessee and Vanderbilt University – for a first-place overall finish. UAH paddlers

had first-place wins in the female endurance race, the male sprint and the female sprint, and took third place in the male endurance and co-ed races.

UAH won the regional championship with a total score of 95.3; followed by the Florida Institute of Technology with 71.7 points; Vanderbilt, 68.6 points; the University of South Alabama, 67.6; and the University of Florida, 64.