

Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca High School Experience, April 2016



One of the things we think a lot about here at foundry10 is how to expand the way people think about learning. In automotive technology education, we brainstormed ways to expose interested automotive students to a wider array of careers involving cars so they could learn more about automotive as an industry. What we came up with in conjunction with our partners at ProFormance Racing and Team Seattle was taking interested students to California, to an IMSA race at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca and then spending time at one of the premier automotive restoration shops, Canepa. The goal was to get the students to think about the automotive industry in a broader way and to have them learn about the career pathways of professionals.

Interested students wrote essays about why a trip like this would be valuable to them and then were interviewed about their passion for cars and how a trip to Laguna Seca would be beneficial to their development within the field. We ultimately selected 5 students and one teacher to go on the trip. Throughout the weekend, we interviewed the students and teacher, observed their interactions with professionals, and discussed with them what they were learning. Bringing the teacher along was a huge advantage as he was able to connect things we saw at the track and shop directly to the classroom. At first bringing an instructor seemed like a luxury, but it proved to be one of the most beneficial parts of the trip; he was the connecting point between the students' prior knowledge and what they were pondering and synthesizing in California. Students spent time with various automotive professionals and were able to ask them questions, not only about their jobs, but how they acquired those positions.



At Canepa, students learned about specialties within automotive that they did not realize existed. Not only did the students see amazing cars, they discussed the history of various automobiles, specific skills (such as upholstery and engine refurbishing) and ended up with a really good sense of the evolution of automobile racing. We had planned to be at the shop for an hour, but ended up spending 3.5 hours talking with folks and looking at cars. It was one of the highlights of the trip for students.



We were really pleased with the results of this experience and would like to extend the experience to additional students in the future. We are also interested in exploring races and special professional opportunities closer to home so that we can increase the number of student participants.



A question we would like to further investigate is: Which types of professional interactions are most valuable for students? We have had students work with professionals on paint, wraps, batteries, motors and at the drag strip as side-by-side partners. At Laguna Seca, we took a different approach and focused the experience on personal interactions with professionals. Our guess is that both have value, but perhaps in different ways. This is something we would like to explore more this upcoming 2016-2017 school year.

What we know for sure as a result of speaking with the students and the teacher, that for the 5 students that went on this trip, having the chance to explore and discuss a wide array of automotive topics with adults who are experts in their field helped them better understand career options, pathways, and the industry itself. In addition, the teamwork and collaboration that the students observed with both the racing team and the restoration shop really helped to illuminate the collective process that true professionals engage with in order to create exceptional cars.