



Photos by David Coates / The Detroit News

Brian Wrightman of Oakland University takes the robot "Coyote" on a test run Monday before the start of the Vehicle System International Ground Robotics Competition in Rochester Hills.

Robots solo at Oakland U.

Japanese defending championship team takes the lead at 6th annual competition.

By Darren A. Nichols
The Detroit News

ROCHESTER HILLS — Hosei University Professor Kajiro Watanbe thought his robotics team had short-circuited.

A day before the Sixth Annual Vehicle System International Ground Robotics Competition, the Hosei team's robotic vehicle burned out a circuit.

It was the last thing team members had expected at the competition at Oakland University, especially after months of project preparations and an 11-hour plane ride from Tokyo.

But the problem was corrected, and Hosei finished third in Monday's event behind the University of Colorado-Denver, which placed first, and the second-place University of Colorado-Boulder.

"I almost gave up on the competition," Watanbe said.

"I'm very proud of them."

Hosei, the defending champion, was one of 14 teams that entered in the event, geared toward using real-world applications to build an autonomous mobile robot.

Oakland University placed fourth Monday, followed by the University of Detroit Mercy, which finished fifth.

Co-sponsors included the U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command, Oakland University and the Society of Automotive Engineers.

Each team built a robotic vehicle, which was required to navigate an outdoor obstacle course in the competition. The team that maneuvered the course the longest inside the lanes won. Points were deducted when a barrier was hit.

Each team used vision systems and sensors to guide the vehicle through the course.

"We really want the stu-



The University of Detroit Mercy team follows its entry — The Electric Chair — through the course.

dents to demonstrate cutting-edge technology," competition spokesman Jim Overholt said. "We've seen some good quality, solid engineering tactics in this competition."

Virginia Tech took the top three spots and \$2,000 in Sunday's design portion of the competition. Students were required to write a paper and make a presentation on their vehicle.

"This is a very interesting competition because you do stuff you can't do in the class-

room," said Brian Wrightman, a junior and an electrical engineering major at Oakland University. "It helps in that you get your hands dirty with the hands-on experience and you have deadlines you must fulfill."

Sean Michalechuk of the University of Alberta said the 48-hour drive from Canada and eight months spent on the project were worth the experience.

"We're going to work and improve so next year we'll be ready to win," he said.