

Aspiring Auto Techs Head to Las Vegas to Compete in Second Annual Student Competition at AAPEX 2026

Nine teams, including an all-female team, from high schools and technical colleges across the country will race to tear down and rebuild V8 engines

LAS VEGAS, NV, UNITED STATES, October 6, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Automotive Aftermarket Product Expo (AAPEX) student competition is returning to the show this year with double the number of schools involved – and triple the number of teams. Nine teams from seven high schools and technical colleges are sending students to compete in the [2nd Annual AAPEX Student Competition](#).



The winning team of the AAPEX 2025 student competition with their coach, judges and event sponsor

"After attending last year's event and sharing my experiences with the class, my students were instantly hooked," said Bob Parmley, an automotive instructor at Arapahoe Community College in Colo.,. "While classroom instruction and lab work build a vital foundation, nothing compares to stepping into the heart of the global automotive industry."

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Bernard Tansey, owner, Euro Clinic

Teams will race each other in a timed event to fully disassemble and reassemble a small block V8 engine in front of a live audience. The competition will unfold over two preliminary rounds with four teams competing at a time in one group and five teams in the other. Next, the four teams with the fastest times will compete in the final round for prizes and bragging rights.

Origin of the student competition

Organizers initiated the first-ever student competition last year at AAPEX 2025. Three teams competed, including two from community colleges and one from a Kansas-based high school, which took first place. The winners took home \$2,000 in prizes last year, including \$1,000 in gift cards and \$1,000 in professional-grade starter tool sets. This year, the prize value for first place is valued at more than \$5,000.

The competition was part of a multi-year plan to improve the show and to call attention to the shortage of auto techs. The U.S. produced less than half of the 241,842 auto technicians it needed last year, according to the TechForce Foundation. The organization projects the country will be short 1.2 million auto techs over the next five years.

“This is a national stage for these students as AAPEX is a ‘homecoming’ of sorts for the [\\$599.7 billion U.S. automotive aftermarket](#),” said Bernard Tansey, the owner of Euro Clinic, an independent repair shop based in Santa Clara, Calif. “It takes initiative for students to sign up for this and work ethic to perform, which are characteristics many employers find desirable.”

Tansey has been the driving force organizing the competition and also serves as a judge and emcee. He’s also been outspoken about the skilled labor shortage and penned an op-ed for the San Francisco Business Times. The piece, a version of which was later republished on the AAPEX blog, [outlined pragmatic steps](#) shop owners can take to address the issue.

Students have prepared to compete



Student team from Arapahoe Community College practicing for the 2026 AAPEX student competition (photo courtesy of automotive instructor and team coach Bob Parmley)



Three teams drew a crowd for the inaugural AAPEX student competition in 2025.

Jack Stow, an A.S.E. certified master automobile technician and automotive instructor with North Kansas City Schools, coached the winning team at last year's event. He's bringing an all-female team to the competition this year and they are coming to win. Stow noted in a phone call with AAPEX last spring that the duo was already putting in the work to practice after school.

An automotive maintenance and light repair teacher at Heritage High School in Palm Bay, Fla., expressed a similar sentiment. Michael A. Broud will coach a pair of students at the competition this year. One student builds dirt bikes on the side, and the other has become "a skilled tuner," who has tuned his Mazda 3Speed Turbo to deliver more than 600 horsepower.

"These two are hungry," Broud said to AAPEX in an email asking for his thoughts on the upcoming competition. "When I asked if they would like to compete, their only question was, 'When do we start?!'"

Improvements to the competition

The event was a highlight of the show last year. It attracted a sizable crowd of show-goers that was hundreds deep. Accordingly, AAPEX has made the event a little more fan-friendly by adding stadium-style seating and large-screen TVs for onlookers this year.

The student competition is being held near Joe's Garage, a staple feature of the AAPEX show. It will be held on Wednesday, November 4, 2026. Preliminary rounds will start at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. The four fastest teams will advance to the final round that determines the winner, which will begin at 4 p.m., Las Vegas time. There is no cost to attend the student competition.

Competition sponsors and community support

The event is made possible by sponsoring businesses and volunteer members of the Auto Care Association Tool & Equipment Community, who coordinated the tools, prizes and gift bags.

The engines are being supplied by Duralast Parts, a private label brand owned and operated by AutoZone, Inc. The engine stands are supplied by Dorman Products, a provider of aftermarket automotive parts and OE solutions.

Prizes for the winning teams are sponsored by Milwaukee Tool and Carlyle Tools.

Additionally, businesses sponsoring tools for the competition include: Snap-on Incorporated, Carlyle Tools, SP Tools USA, Lisle Corporation and SureWerx.

Register for AAPEX 2026

Registration for AAPEX 2026 is open for automotive aftermarket professionals; register here. Passes to the show are \$100. Students and members of the media are eligible for a complimentary pass to AAPEX.

About AAPEX

AAPEX unites the global automotive aftermarket – a market valued at \$2.65 trillion worldwide and \$599.7 billion in the U.S. – that keeps the world's 1.61 billion vehicles safely on the road. The annual tradeshow attracts thousands of exhibitors and tens of thousands of attendees from around the world to find new products and innovations, expand business relationships, and advance their team's skills with world-class technical and business training sessions.

Exhibitors span suppliers, manufacturers, remanufacturers, technology solution providers, and more. Industry buyers that attend include automotive service and repair professionals, auto parts retailers, quick lube businesses, independent warehouse distributors, program groups, service chains, automotive dealers, fleet buyers and engine builders.

AAPEX is a trade-only event and is closed to the general public.

AAPEX is co-produced by MEMA Aftermarket Suppliers and the Auto Care Association. For more information, visit aapexshow.com or email: info@aapexshow.com.

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