

Motor project drives students to succeed

Hard-working six win Gasp's coveted group award

By Chris Madden

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MORE than 170 Surrey students got hands-on with the finer points of the motoring trade at a series of courses run by a charity.

The Gasp Project gives lessons in the basics of motoring, delivering accredited AQA courses to 14- to 19-year-olds across the county, often in some of the most deprived areas.

On October 8 the best students from courses in the past academic year were recognised at an awards ceremony hosted by McLaren at its technology centre outside Woking.

This year the group achievement award went to six students – two girls and four boys – from West Hill School in Ashted where Gasp delivered a six-week course funded by ExxonMobil.

A silver rose bowl, was presented to three of the students by Surrey County Council chairman Sally Marks, in front of an audience that included the Lord Lieutenant of Surrey, Michael More-Molyneux, and the council's chief executive David McNulty.

The prizewinners also received a socket set and a McLaren cap.

Gasp chief executive Andy Finch said: "Each year we work



TOP GEAR: Surrey County Council chairman Sally Marks with some of the winners from West Hill School

with groups of young people from a wide range of schools and referring agencies.

"When a group really gels, it can lead to outstanding results – over and above what anyone may have thought possible.

"Our group achievement award recognises when that 'engagement' happens.

Engines

"From the very first session the West Hill students were keen to be involved. Working individually or in pairs, they responded well to instruction, were always keen to learn, and had a positive 'can do' attitude."

The six students who took home the prize were Aston Branch, Tahima Chowdhury, Aidan Curtis, Jack Darch, Austin Lewis and Rhys Slater.

Jack said: "I learned how to dismantle engines. It was great as I want to be a mechanic."

On visiting one of the sessions at the Kingston Road school, Sophie Foale, ExxonMobil's community affairs adviser, said: "[It is] great to see the young people at West Hill so engaged with their



RACING AHEAD: West Hill students tour the McLaren facility

learning, and clearly enjoying every aspect of it."

Gasp, a charitable programme, selected the very best students of the year for the awards.

"This awards event is the Gasp equivalent of a school prize-giving," said Gasp chair of trustees, Sally Varah.

"The award recipients should all feel very pleased with themselves."

After the presentations, the prizewinners and their guests

enjoyed a tour of the McLaren Technology and Production Centre. They were also photographed with one of the latest McLaren Formula One cars.

Mr McNulty, a champion of Gasp, said: "Gasp is outstanding.

"It stands head and shoulders above the rest in the way this charity is always looking at ways to improve, to make the programmes better and develop new partnerships and new opportunities."