

Newest EAB Member Brings Extensive Automotive Experience

The newest member of the ME External Advisory Board is Dr. Gerhard Schmidt, Vice President-Research and Advanced Engineering at Ford Motor Company. Schmidt, who joined the EAB in 2002, leads Ford's worldwide research organization.

The approximately 1,300 scientists, engineers, and technicians who comprise the Ford research staff concentrate on anticipating the technical needs of Ford customers, providing innovative solutions to technical challenges, and incorporating those solutions into products and processes. As head of Research and Advanced Engineering, Schmidt also oversees the planning, development and implementation of Ford's top global technology objectives.

Prior to his arrival at Ford, Schmidt served as Senior Vice President Vehicle Integration at BMW AG and spent ten years as Senior Vice President Powertrain Development for the German automaker. During his twenty-one years at BMW, Schmidt held a wide range of leadership roles in engine research and development.

Schmidt's first association with ME came shortly after he joined Ford in April 2001. He visited the Department of Mechanical Engineering and also hosted a delegation of ME professors at the Ford Scientific Research Lab last year. In May 2001, a group of powertrain technical specialists led by Graham Hoare, Director of Powertrain Research and Advanced Engineering, visited ME Chair Dennis Assanis and other ME faculty members. The purpose of this visit was to consider U-M for inclusion as one of the three to five "elite" university powertrain research and development partner universities that Ford was considering.

Accepting the invitation to join the EAB was an easy decision for Schmidt. He was aware that, historically, Ford viewed the University

of Michigan as a preferred partner in recruiting, continuing education, and collaborative research. He also recognized that U-M is the largest provider of engineering talent to Ford.

"Our reasons for partnering with the University of Michigan are as strong as ever," said Schmidt, "and furthering our awareness of one another can only help strengthen this mutually beneficial relationship."

Schmidt also expressed his admiration for what he sees as the good balance between academic and industry orientations in the ME department, remarking on the strong work ongoing in basic science alongside very practical application-oriented development. "The university research needs of Ford Motor Company span a continuum from fairly basic fundamental science in some areas to very practical development in others," he said. "The University of Michigan Mechanical Engineering department can meet many of our needs across this spectrum."

In keeping with his commitment to maintaining the close ties to ME, Schmidt noted that he has already met with a number of ME faculty members, including Professors A. Galip Ulsoy, Panos Papalambros, and Yoram Koren. He also noted the many ME alumni working within Research and Advanced Engineering.

"Ford Motor Company will continue to have a strong preferred relationship with the University of Michigan," said Schmidt, "and there is an opportunity to expand this relationship as we select partner universities at which we will conduct the majority of our university-based power train research and development work."

Schmidt's primary goal as member of the EAB focuses on greater communication and mutual awareness between U-M and Ford, which he believes can have a positive benefit on student



Dr. Gerhard Schmidt

education. He feels that if history is a guide, a greater number of Michigan engineers will go to work at Ford than any other corporation. Helping the students understand what is important and what will help them succeed in industry is an important endeavor to which he believes Ford should contribute.

Above all, he said, "I look forward to my participation on the EAB, and the continued fruitful relationship between the University of Michigan and Ford Research and Advanced Engineering."

Schmidt received his degree in mechanical engineering in 1971 from the University of Aachen in Germany, and his PhD in investigations on stratified charge – internal combustion engines in 1979 from the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering at the University of Aachen. He is a native of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany.