NEW BRITAIN — Stafford Motor Speedway is the only place in Connecticut where NASCAR fans can watch their sport live, but the race held there today features vehicles powered by people rather than petrochemicals.

The race is part of the annual Human-Powered Vehicle Challenge sponsored by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers.

Central Connecticut State University hosted this year’s eastern division race, and Friday, the day before the races, teams from two dozen universities (including CCSU) in the eastern half of Canada, the U.S. and Venezuela met on campus for their design presentations and preliminary safety checks.

“The club got the funding to build the vehicle,” said Ben Haase, president of the school’s Human-Powered Vehicle Club. “Over the last two semesters, we designed it on a computer and built it in the lab downstairs” in the school’s Copernicus Hall.

The CCSU team’s vehicle was called “Devil’s Chariot,” a nod to the school’s Blue Devil mascot. The best way to describe Devil’s Chariot for non-engineers is an extremely sleek, aerodynamic tricycle.

During the early part of the day, the various teams of student engineers gave presentations on how they designed their vehicles.

Charles Hart and Johnny Kassay made the presentation on behalf of CCSU’s team, discussing which materials they chose and why, how the tricycle design gave their vehicle greater stability, especially over rough terrain, and other factors.

The other team members are Lead Designer Josh Treadwell and designer/builder Shayna Bartell.

A test course was set up on a wide, paved empty area of the campus. Nicole Zabel, an ASME committee member who served as the day’s course coordinator, said, among other things, the vehicles would have to meet certain safety standards, such as rollover protection and harness requirements; and demonstrate the ability to go straight for a minimum of 100 feet, turn within a 25-foot radius, travel up to 15 miles per hour and stop within 20 feet.

There’s two classes of competition, Haase said. “The speed class and the unrestricted class.” The speed class basically tests how fast the vehicle can go.

The unrestricted class looks more for utilitarian features, such as the ability to carry groceries and other small freight.

For the speed-class testing, Devil’s Chariot will keep its doors on, to add to the aerodynamic effect; for the unrestricted class, the doors will be removed to allow room for storage.

More information about CCSU’s Human-Powered Vehicle Club, including previous years’ vehicles, can be found online at ccsuhumanpowered.com.