

The Coolest Cylinder in Michigan

You might not expect a humble cylinder to garner more attention than a luxury boat or a giant, shiny stage prop, and yet that's just what happened in Michigan's latest contest celebrating local manufacturers' contributions.

Alex Cannella, Associate Editor

This year's second annual "Coolest Thing Made in Michigan" award had, as one might expect from the name, some pretty cool things in the running. A luxury pontoon boat that looks like a sports car with turbines, right down to the LED light trim; a massive art construction of 3D modeled steel wings that was the centerpiece onstage at Aerosmith's most recent tour; and a universal remote you can connect to your phone.

And yet, the eponymous coolest thing of all — the device that took the actual award — was a cylinder. With so many flashy contenders, that's a bit of an eyebrow raiser at first glance, isn't it?

But Peninsular Cylinder's booster cylinder, a custom job done for FTI Machine Worx, is in fact pretty cool. The engineers at Peninsular are no strangers to custom jobs, but even by their standards, this one was a doozy. Designed as an amplifier for faster cycle rates and pushing higher pressure into a hydraulic system, Peninsular's cylinder demanded wildly different specifications from the norm: 20 cycles per second, a shorter stroke, and the ability to spike pressure from an input of 1700 psi up to an output of 11,000 psi. And thanks to those unique demands, the cylinder has found an equally interesting niche: product testing.

As Peninsular's president, Henry Haver, broke it down, you have two options for testing. Digital testing is cheaper, while actual real world validation testing gives you better results at the cost of a hefty bill. The booster cylinder, however, is one way to achieve that validation testing on a more affordable budget.

"Our product is a stopgap," Haver said. "For a lot less money, anyone who wants to build some type of a testing machine, they can actually do that real world validation testing."

The booster cylinder Peninsular entered into the contest this year is the result of years of hard work and iterative improvements on that design. So after all that blood and sweat, it's no small surprise that when the Coolest Thing Made in Michigan came around and the Michigan Manufacturers Association asked for submissions, this was the one product above all others they put forward.

The contest itself was decided via simple popular vote, but considering Peninsular wasn't even the biggest company in the running, that just makes their win all the more impressive. After all, in a competition like this, you would expect all the attention to fall on the flashy, finished products like that pontoon boat instead of the engine that runs it. But here was an unlikely and rare moment where the spotlight was suddenly shining on a single component, where eyes outside of the industry were suddenly paying attention to this product.

And according to Haver, that very unlikelihood is what set a fire under the entire company.

"It's probably rare that you get an opportunity to say 'look



Peninsular Cylinder recently took home the Coolest Thing Made in Michigan award for their work on a custom booster cylinder. Pictured left to right: Chadwick Conte, senior marketing strategist at Peninsular Cylinder Company, Chuck Hadden, MMA president and CEO, and Bud Haver, president of Peninsular Cylinder Company.

at what we did..." Haver said. "It just triggered us right away to say 'hey, we should do this.' Just a matter of satisfaction. Everybody is very proud of what we do here."

"We did as much of a grassroots effort as we could," Chadwick Conte, senior marketing strategist for Peninsular Cylinder Co., said. "All the employees were all fired up about it — the entire team. We wouldn't have even reached the top ten had it not caught fire."

According to Conte, that campaign pulled in plenty of help from outside the company, with all the usual friends-and-family votes you would expect, but also a number from the company's own nation-wide network of customers when the contest became a talking point among the sales team. And it all kept gaining momentum up until the day of the contest, culminating in that first place trophy and a celebration once their representatives got back home.

It's a victory lap they're still enjoying, and no doubt will for months to come. The award is a nice feather in the company's hat for the sales department to point to. But the part about the experience that seems to be sticking with the company most is the excitement that comes from being able to emerge from behind the scenes to be recognized for all their hard work. **PTE**

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