

Race team hopes to set design standard for the "Formula One" of off road racing

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ROCKFORD, Ill. ([PRWEB](#)) May 23, 2004 -- Can four engineers shake up the Championship Off Road Racing Super Buggy Sportsman Division with a compact, Honda-powered buggy that draws its design cues from the college Mini-Baja racing circuit?

That's the intent of team led by vehicle designer and racer John C. Frana. His racing team will unveil a buggy with a mid-frame mounted engine, dual A-arm front and rear suspension, custom CV joints and other innovations when the circuit kicks off Memorial Day weekend at Trollhaugen Ski Area, Dresser, Wis. The Frana Group's entry is a fresh design in a race series that heavily relies on the VW Beetle design.

"I wanted a design that would shake up the class," says Frana, 27, chief engineer at Rockford Acromatic Products, which makes CV joints and U joints for the automotive aftermarket. "We looked into getting into the Super Buggy class and it seemed that just to get a used car would be at least \$10,000, minus the engine and transmission. For that kind of money we decided to build one."

While he's new to the series, he's not new to vehicle design. Frana, a 1999 graduate of the University of Illinois with a bachelor's of science degree in mechanical engineering, captained the university's Mini Baja team. College teams from around the U.S. build off-road vehicles to survive the punishment of rough terrain. Frana designed his team's vehicles in 1998 and 1999. Frana's 1998 design won second in maneuverability. The 1999 entry won firsts in maneuverability and hill climbing, and third in acceleration.

Frana says the Super Buggy class is the Formula One of off road racing. With few rules, it allows designers to innovate.

"You have a lot more freedom than a lot of classes where you have to use this transmission, that suspension or a certain frame," he says. "For Super Buggy, there isn't a maximum size or minimum weight. You can make it as large or as light as you want."

Frana says his buggy is lighter, stronger and handles better than rear engine buggies. The frame is made steel tubing. The mid-engine design makes his buggy more compact. Frana says the 1.6-liter Honda engine is powerful and there are plenty of aftermarket parts readily available.

Frana's crew chief is his brother, Jeff Frana. Jeff Frana, 25, a Michigan Technological University grad with a mechanical engineering technology degree, was crew chief the last two years for Scott Taylor, the 2003 CORR Pro-2 Champion. Jeff Frana's crewmates are fellow MTU alums -- engineering grads Ryan Brumund of Barrington, Ill., and Eric Bode of Buffalo Grove, Ill. All three men were on Michigan Tech's Mini Baja teams. The crew has 16 years experience designing and building off road racing vehicles and 13 years additional racing experience.



The Frana team's sponsors include:

• Sway-A-Way, the Chatsworth, Calif., high performance suspension components manufacturer

• Plymouth Tube, a Streator, Ill., manufacturer of alloy tubing

• RVC Performance Products, Loves Park, which provided the team with custom billet 4340 shafts and CV joints, including a new CV Joint with a spherical boot design

• World Class Tool & Machine, Rockford, Ill., which provided CNC machined parts for suspension components



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