

Yelm FFA Grad Restores 50-Year-Old Sports Car to its Former Glory

Project Helps Jacob Sneddon Earn Prestigious American FFA Degree

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A “sunburnt orange” 1970 Datsun 240Z — one of the first of its kind ever to be manufactured — dozes under the sun’s slanting rays on a sparkling fall day last week at the home of former Yelm FFA student Jacob Sneddon.

The car, on a ramp inside an open-sided metal garage on the backside of the family property, is Sneddon’s baby. He’s been refurbishing the then-popular sports car since he bought it in 2017. The project, as it would metamorphose, would become the most endeared part of his FFA Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE).

The SAE is one part of a three-tiered Yelm High School agricultural education program that also includes classroom instruction and FFA participation. Students are expected to participate in all three integrated components as they work through their agricultural curriculum.

According to Yelm FFA, involvement in the SAE program allows students “to consider multiple careers and occupations, learn expected workplace behavior, and develop specific skills within an industry.”

Students are then offered “opportunities to apply academic and occupational skills in the workplace or in a simulated workplace environment.”

Sneddon’s SAE first helped him obtain his state FFA Degree and then proved crucial recently as he earned the coveted American FFA Degree at the end of October during the virtual National FFA Convention.

Sneddon’s versatility and personality helped pave the way for his FFA success, wrote Hillary Hull, a Yelm High School agricultural teacher and FFA advisor, in an email to the Nisqually Valley News: “Jacob was able to take on any task big or small and complete it to the best of his ability,” she wrote. “His sense of humor and contagious laugh is something that made the long days and crazy projects all worth it.”

“He has a very well rounded SAE project and worked many hours to even be eligible for the American FFA Degree.”

The car project, Hull explained last week, met SAE requirements in the category of agricultural

mechanics, which would qualify Sneddon to work on farm equipment if he ever chose to do so.

The second aspect of his SAE involved community service and landscaping. As a budding 16-year-old, Sneddon began working for Yelm-based Puget Sound Entertainment, which rented supplies for parties, stage shows, tradeshow and a variety of other area events.

Sneddon, who called himself the PSE “jack of all trades,” was eventually promoted to manager of the business, performing Information Technology (IT), planning events, and completing a host of other tasks. He would end up working at PSE for four years through high school and SPSCC.

“If there was something I didn’t know how to do, I would take the time to learn how to do it, and how to do it properly,” he wrote in an email. “This led me to doing a bunch of random jobs, including landscaping.”

Sneddon joined six of his Yelm FFA graduates in receiving the American degree: They are Isabela Burke, Abbie Dorhauer, Kelsey Hinton, Ty Hummel, Cassandra Hyder, and Addyson Wilson-Heid.

According to the National FFA Organization, the American FFA degree is the “gold standard” for FFA members — the organization’s highest achievable degree.

“The American FFA Degree show’s an FFA member’s dedication to his or her chapter and state FFA association,” the organization’s statement reads. “It demonstrates the effort FFA members apply toward their supervised agricultural experience and the outstanding leadership abilities and community involvement they exhibited through their FFA career.”

Sneddon, who received an email from the National FFA Organization in mid-September announcing his American FFA Degree, was pleased he’d been chosen and satisfied his hard work had paid off.

“It cheered me up and was a nice reminder of the work I’d done and the recognition for it,” he said.

Sneddon — who graduated from Yelm High School in 2019 and soon after earned his AA degree after completing the Running Start Program at South Puget Sound Community College — thinks the degree could open a few doors for him down the road. That’s despite the fact he’s now a junior computer science major at Central Washington University and isn’t pursuing an agriculture-related career.

“If I was to be in the agricultural business, the degree would be a huge bonus in searching for a job,” said Sneddon, who’s looking for-



Paul Dunn/Nisqually Valley News

Yelm native Jacob Sneddon, 19, has spent three years refurbishing his 1970 Datsun 240Z that helped him earn the prestigious American FFA Degree during a ceremony in late October.

ward to programming computers after he graduates. “But I feel like even in another career it could still catch an employer’s eye and lead to discussions about FFA and my past experience.”

And, of course, kindle memories of the restored 240Z, which has its own story to tell.

Sneddon’s Z — which didn’t run when he first purchased it and now has a turbo-charged motor under the hood — is definitely a conversation starter. The young mechanic figures he’s put about \$12,000 into the car over the past three years he’s worked on it.

“I’ve done a lot to it,” the 19-year-old said last week, lounging for a moment on the Z’s front fender. “I’ve touched every part of the car for better or worse.”

Sneddon chose the 240Z as he looked in 2017 for a vehicle to refurbish, because, he said, “it was the odd one out.”

“It was unique, and I didn’t know a single person who had one at the time,” said Sneddon, who shares a car-restoration passion with his dad Alex, the two of them having rehabilitated and sold multiple cars over the years.

For a couple of years after he purchased it, Sneddon tinkered with the Z off and on, but soon revved up his motivation after he and YHS agricultural teacher and FFA advisor Matt Mounts devised a plan to include the car’s restoration as part of his SAE project.

So with a gentle nudge from Mounts, Sneddon got to work.

First job was finding a motor to swap for the Z’s original, which was kaput. Turns out Sneddon lo-

ated just the right one — a 1997 BMW E 36 M3 — that with a few adjustments fit right in.

After that, Sneddon methodically went through the car bit by bit until it was safely driveable and reliable. His long to-do list included reviewing the brake lines — check; fuel lines — check; brake system — check; fuel tank — check; clutch lines — check, rewiring everything so the Z wouldn’t catch on fire — double check. The necessities never seemed to end.

“You go through everything, and the list just goes on and on, but slowly and surely it gets done,” he said. “It was lots and lots of time and custom work.”

And now after three years, the car’s ready for a little TLC on the body and interior, but not much else. Sneddon said he drives the car all the time on nice days and relishes the results of his hard work.

He also appreciated his days in Yelm FFA and especially recalled his agriculture teachers and FFA advisors as valued mentors. Sneddon originally joined the organization while in eighth grade at Ridge-line Middle School in Yelm.

“I enjoyed the sense of community,” Sneddon said. “And the teachers always went out of their ways to make sure we had smiles on our faces and were enjoying ourselves.”

But they didn’t coddle their pupils, Sneddon recalled.

“The FFA/Ag advisors are really supportive, but they pushed you to get out of your comfort zone and do things that you might not do otherwise,” he said.

Sneddon, too, enjoyed a simi-

lar role with less-experienced FFA members.

“I really enjoyed being able to reach out and help the younger people,” he said. “It was kind of fun to be able to break people out of their shells.”

Mounts recalls Sneddon as a Yelm FFA whirling dervish.

“Jacob was our ‘Go to Guy’ when it came to big events,” Mounts wrote in an email to the Nisqually Valley News. “He always had a connection or the know-how to set up/acquire the right equipment. Jacob could network with anyone. He always brought tons of laughs and success with him whatever we were doing. No idea was too big.”

And now for the first time, the Yelm-grown lad with the big ideas is living away from home, sharing a duplex in Ellensburg with two other friends.

“I’m definitely enjoying the freedom and taking the first steps into adulthood without people there to watch over and take care of me,” he said.

And in the process, he and his roomies are keenly aware of COVID-19 and their responsibilities concerning it.

“We definitely are airing on the side of caution so we don’t have to worry about getting COVID and more importantly not giving it to our older family members,” he said.

When he’s not slammed with college work — all online this fall quarter — Sneddon can be found playing computer games an hour or two a day if possible, hiking, watching ice hockey — and, of course, contemplating the finishing touches to his 240Z.

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