



## 2003 World Solar Challenge

Darwin > Adelaide 19 - 28 October 2003

### Report 7

Saturday 18 October 2003

### Preparations for Competing in the 2003 World Solar Challenge

Action Day and the action was at Darwin's famous Hidden Valley racing track. Usually it is the deafening sound of hot sedans and powerful V8 supercars recording laps of just over a minute on the 2.9km track. Today it was the world's best collection of streamlined, solar cell covered supercars. No fuel, no exhaust gases and almost no noise. Now that's a big change.

The teams began to assemble at 7.00am in their assigned pits. The officials progressively briefed each team about the qualifying procedure and final testing of braking required by the Department of Transport. We were just itching to get out there and post our best shot. But how about breakfast? Sure enough, Caroline had this covered just as if we were back in camp. Three cereals, fruit, pancakes and bacon and eggs. Dream on; actually it was just cereals.

After the rush to get there we waited until 9.00am to be invited to be the first team out on the track. This was done in groups of 4 solar cars. Aurora, Southern Aurora, Bockum and AGU from Japan made the first group. This created enormous interest amongst the spectators as it was more like real racing. Many stop-watches were suddenly seen. But a last minute practice lap by the Nuna solar car to do brake testing was allowed confirming that the Dutch car needed other adjustments.





Mark Gilligan was in the hot seat. He had recorded 2 min 20 secs in practice on Wednesday so this was the time to beat. Could he do it? The first warm up lap looked smooth and quick as Mark settled into his cornering lines. The trouble was that he was also threatening to lap some of the cars in the group of 4. The second lap was the hot one and Mark knew it. He was quick but on a set of corners caught our sister car from Hamilton just slowing his momentum. But at the finish line he stopped the clocks at 2 min 15 secs. That was going to be hard to beat. The track session was completed by passing the mandatory stability test and the final braking test with ease. We all thought Mark really wanted another round of breakfast.

Bockum was next fastest in this early group recording 2 min 28 secs. Surprisingly Southern Aurora did a great 2 min 34 secs to be third fastest. It was time to set up Aurora's hospitality area and to have other teams meet us, get a cool drink and become familiar with our sponsors. Now the wait to see how the other teams would fare in this qualifying procedure. Which cars would surprise?



Southern Aurora

There were surprises and they came from new teams from Taiwan and Malaysia. The Taiwan team Formosun Two beat the vaunted American solar car MIT. Suria Kar 2 from Malaysia posted fifth best. But what about the race heavy-weights Queens and Nuna 2? Disappointingly, they filled 11th and 10th respectively with slow times. This will matter little in the long distance race ahead but after the end of qualifying Aurora 101 was in front and will lead from the start tomorrow as this exciting group on cars slide away from the Novotel Hotel on the Esplanade.



The Queens solar car

The full results for the top 15 places are as follows:

1.	Aurora 101	2-15.40
2.	Formosan	2-23.34
3.	MIT	2-24.92
4.	Bochum	2-28.15
5.	Suria Kar 2	2-31.24
6.	Southern Aurora	2-34.00
7.	Houston	2-35.23
8.	Southern Taiwan	2-35.32
9.	AGU Japan	2-39.29
10.	Nuna 2	2-42.95
11.	Queens	2-43.27
12.	Principia	2-45.95
13.	Kormilda NT	2-53.92
14.	Kelly SA	3-00.26
15.	Helios France	3-03.56

The drama of the day was the plight of the team from Puerto Rico. For days and nights they had tried to repair their badly damaged car. They missed their scrutineering session. On several occasions when they saw some life, another thing would go wrong. It was frustration and tears to the point of desperation. The officials were excruciatingly patient in their desire to see this team reach the start line. By late afternoon it finally looked to be a possibility. But there was another race car meet using the track. Amazingly those officials made the track available for the time that Puerto Rico was finally ready to face the track test. By sunset they finally qualified to be on the starting line; dead last but on the grid. Dennis Thoroughgood and Peter Pudney made valuable technical contributions to the repairs and also helped the French, Annesley, Mannum, Nuna and naturally Southern Aurora.



The day was finished by cleaning the solar panel, testing a motor, shopping for trip food, attending the driver's meeting, going to the Government reception and packing for the trip. Where was that early night?



What a day! The first time that the World Solar Challenge would be led from the start by an Australian team. Aurora's second car is in sixth place. Who needs sleep. Watch for race updates over the next 4 days.

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