



AURORA 101 in Greece

Phaethon 2004, 22-28 May 2004

Report 7 - Sunday 23rd May

Finally it was race day. The first one-hour race was scheduled for 11am, and the second for 5.30pm. This schedule allowed for solar cars to charge their batteries from sunlight between the two heats.



Hellenikon airport had been transformed. There were grandstands, fencing, trackside viewing areas, screens to show results, officials and timekeeper headquarters, a food stall and the national flags of the solar racers.



A short familiarization session took place from 8.30am. Qualifying practice from 9.40am and only for 30 minutes duration. 12 cars were presented for qualifying and it became evident that the battle for line honours would be between the TIGA and OSU teams. TIGA clocked 1:42.6 to be the fastest. On this track that was an average speed of 94.34km/h. OSU was only 1 second behind. Then Aurora 101 led the rest of the field clocking an

average of nearly 80km/h. The surprise time came from the Taiwanese entry, Apollo IV. They achieved the 6th fastest qualifying speed. This was the team that was wondering how many cars would be on the track at once. For Aurora 101 it became noticeable that as the temperatures rose the motor controller reduced it's power output in order not to overheat. This added about 10 seconds per lap. OSU and TIGA were both equipped with additional motor power and it was clearly evident from their track performance.



The excitement mounted as the solar cars were called to assemble on the starting grid. Finally all was in order, the track was cleared and the racers were ready for the starters flag. Just to increase the excitement the loudspeakers blasted the sounds of Formula 1, but then the track announcer guaranteed that no such sounds would be heard. By the end of the first lap it was already a desperate battle for the lead between the 2 Osaka based teams. Kon had the Aurora 101 solidly in third place but not far ahead of the surprising Taiwanese car. The abrasive track was already taking its toll on tyres and Yale were parked on the track with a blown tyre after 4 laps. This was repeated within the 1-hour race.



As the motor controller temperature peaked again for Aurora 101 the Taiwanese finally passed us. But several laps later they also had a blown tyre which caused them to roll the car on one of the sharper corners. This is a rare site in solar car event and we all hoped the driver was OK. He was. (By midnight the car was again running).



The fantastic tussle for the lead continued and finally TIGA took the chequered flag. They had averaged 85.87km/h, just ahead of OSU and five laps ahead of Aurora 101. Only 9 cars were listed as official finishers, another 4 being excluded. The crowd really seemed to like this race and surrounded the cars at the end of it.

The second heat started at 5.30pm and was again battle for the lead but at even faster speeds than the earlier race. TIGA again won. Aurora 101 finished in 5th place and suffered intermittent motor shut-off. This occurred about a dozen times. While driving, this felt like a sudden loss of power. One second you were powering along at a good pace, the next the thumb throttle was doing nothing but move without any effect on the car. You then had to switch the key to off and patiently wait while the Motec switched off before restarting, all the while still trying to negotiate a corner or two. This setback cost us the aggregate third place, which went to another Japanese team Tokai Falcon. Aurora 101 finished in overall 4th place.



In the post race examination we discovered the sensor plug for the motor had been trapped between the wheel spat and it's own guard, pulling the plug out. Easily fixed once we knew what it was.

So, the first of the two Phaethon 2004 events was exciting, new to Athens, and perhaps pointed to the future of solar car racing. It was time for the teams to prepare for the second of the Phaethon 2004 events, a five day 900km rally in the Greek countryside.

Tomorrow we undertake the trip to Patras, which will include two special competitive stages and will follow the main highway. We will experience the half-lane shoulder, which is common on Athens roads, and again this will be a totally new experience for the solar car world.

It's time to get some sleep.

