

Suzuka Dream Cup 2004



Suzuka, Japan

30th July - 1st August 2004

Report 5 - Saturday 31st July

As we experienced in 2003 before a major solar car race, the event commences before we have finished building or changing our car. You would think that there would be no more to do!

Saturday at Suzuka was full of activity. With scrutineering finished the day before, the only focus was on how the world's largest group of solar cars would perform on the track.

The hoped for sunshine never materialised. The morning was grey, wet and windy. Actually, windy is an understatement; more like the outer lashings of the typhoon stationed off the east coast of Japan.



The first untimed practice session was a short 20 minutes, and was due to start at 7.55 AM. Damien prepared to drive this session. He had a great drive in 2003 and was itching to try the full track again. At 7.45 AM the race officials gave in to the rain and the high winds and rescheduled the day's events by 2 hours.



At 10.00 AM Damien joined the cars on the track and got 3 laps of the track. Not at high speed but all the teams were cautious of this most unlikely weather for solar cars. Many of the junior cars are tall with arrays vulnerable to wind.

By 12.00 PM official timed practice began this time with Derrick in the driver's seat. TIGA, last year's winning team had their red rocket on the track early and their ace driver Kei Nomura just about flew to record a time of 3min 42 secs. This was 20 seconds better than his blitzing time in 2003. It was looking like Phaethon 2004 in Greece. The other Osaka team OSU also did a great time at 4 min 3 secs.

Derrick tentatively went out and did a slow familiarisation lap. On his next lap he started to get excited and recorded 4 min 13 secs. Good for 5th place. Hoping for better with his technique of hard cornering his run came to an end when he spun the car at the end of the straight, puncturing 2 rear tyres. So 5th it was.



Not a blink of sunshine. Just wild winds, scudding cloud and rain. Still, it was a pleasure to have Chris Selwood, Director of the classic solar car event in Australia visit our pit area. Also the Iwata family one of the pioneers of Japanese solar car racing made a visit.



Finally the race was on precisely at 3.00 PM and we rushed back to the pits to watch the race on TV. Derrick had made a terrific start and jumped to second place behind the slick ENAX car.



But before long he ran into a problem. He reported sparks and the need to reset the controller a dozen times. Without finding a problem the pit crew sent him out again and on this next lap there really were sparks. An internal sensor in the wheel motor had failed. A new motor went in and Derrick began the chase to get back into the race. From 24th place.



What a great chase. Soon the pit screens announced that Aurora 101 had achieved the fastest lap. Then we were back on the screens in 24th place and this became tense and fascinating watching. Lap after lap the position improved. Two more 'fastest laps' were recorded and finally when the race was called off as Derrick had slashed to 5th place.

We are one lap down from the race leaders, but we wish we had more battery energy left as the weather may be bleak again tomorrow.

But if the typhoon finally passes on we have a chance for a top three finish. Now we need sunshine. The solar car is finally running well and we are enjoying the hospitality and the conditions.

Did we tell you that the computer for our telemetry system has failed?
