

Suzuka Dream Cup 2005



Suzuka, Japan
5th - 7th August 2005

Report 6 - Saturday 6th August

This was an intensely interesting day, full of activity and great racing. The Aurora team even had an early departure from the Suzuka track, a decent dinner and an early night.

Derrick, Jack and Tom all shuffled down to the lobby at 6.45 AM reporting that they were feeling a bit better. We needed that. So far the other team members have resisted catching the same problems.

The Aurora team loves working on the solar car and sometimes has difficulty in switching to race mode. But today was about racing, starting with the first 30 minute untimed practice at 7.45 AM. Our sick Derrick climbed in for the first opportunity to drive the car since the fire on Thursday. None of us had a great deal of confidence in what would happen but Derrick completed 3 slow laps without a problem. He did say that the hydraulic brakes needed adjustment and that the handling was worse than when he had last driven the solar car on Wednesday.



Adjustments were made and by 9.00 AM we were ready to send Derrick out again with instructions to just record three or four moderate lap times and then bring the car back in.

His second lap registered at 4'08, 5 seconds faster than his best in 2004. Then it was 4'00 and a close second fastest. Good enough for a front row grid position. OSU were the fastest qualifier and TIGA fifth. That was a surprise. We were elated and starting to build confidence in our work and Derrick's driving skills.

But the officials had bad news for us. In departing the pits for the start of qualifying practice, Derrick had crossed the white line and we received a 1 minute penalty to our qualifying lap time. That relegated us to number sixteen on the

grid. They had pictures to prove it, like a speed camera fine. No appeal would change the position or the determination of the Chief Steward Dennis Negkas to apply the penalty set out in the rules.

A last visit to the medical center drew a good collection of pills and antibiotics to see the team through the day.

At 12.30 PM the field of entrants in the Dream and Challenge classes were pushed out to the starting grid. At five minutes before the start the support team had to leave Derrick on his own and ready to race. And did he! By the end of the first lap Aurora 101 was in fourth position. TIGA, OSU and were ahead. By lap two Derrick was competing nose to tail with OSU and TIGA in a tight 3 car pack. Our Taiwanese pit neighbours were in fifth position doing very well in their first Suzuka appearance. These three were recording lap times of about 4'30 on track to better Aurora's 2003 record of 50 laps. Aurora was in front by lap 6 but the lead kept changing. Derrick recorded 4'35 on lap 12, the fastest in the race at that point. Then 4'33 on lap 15, and 4'23 on lap 20. This was a fast pace but exciting close racing. Around two hours teams were stopping for a mandatory driver change; often with a tyre change.

We intended to keep Derrick in the car for three hours, even longer if he could stand it. On lap 23 he registered 4'21 another race record lap and we had to demand he slow down and conserve the energy. From laps 30 to 39 Aurora 101 led the field but still had to make a mandatory driver change. We were also prepared to make a full tyre change so when Derrick could face no more at 3 hours we brought him in. The car was lifted off the ground in one movement on Jack's jack. The Dunlop Solarmax tyres were checked but were excellent, no changes required. The driver change was the fastest we had ever done at less than two minutes. It was Dan's turn to race a solar car for the first time.



Dan started cautiously at lap times around 5 minutes but got faster with more experience. On lap 50 he recorded his best time of 4'33 and passed second place OSU as well. In the end OSU re-passed us on lap 51 so the finishing order was TIGA with 52 laps then OSU on 51 and Aurora 101 on 51.



We now need sun tomorrow for charging the batteries from 10.00 AM and for a resumption of the high speed competition between these three teams



Aurora has had a great day and continues for a top three position in the 2005 Suzuka Dream Cup.
