

Rallye solaire 2006



Girona, Spain to Toulouse, France 1st - 4th June 2006

Day 4

This time, breakfast was lavish, and included sliced meats, tomatoes, garlic cloves, toast (of course), milk, coffee and chocolate.

The local police arrived (they would hand over to the state police when the convoy reached the outskirts of Gerona). Fourteen entrants lined up for the start, and the convoy moved off towards the centre of Gerona. This was the first real experience with the narrow inner-city roads and lanes, barely allowing enough room for the larger solar cars to negotiate the tighter turns.



The Policia escort

As one of the major event sponsors, the City of Gerona was happy to have the entrants displayed on the main bridge in the centre of the old part of the city. We were welcomed by the Mayor, who addressed the crowd using a solar-powered public address system. Really noticeable was the extreme brightness of light and the clarity of the atmosphere. The local residents, and many tourists, were curious about the cars. At 1.00pm, the convoy moved off for the second leg of the day, again threading through the extremely narrow streets of the old city.



Helios spot something interesting



A French licence plate



The view from the bridge



Kon is ready to go

Initially, the convoy moved slowly, governed by the speed of the electric scooters and the cyclists. Everything was going well. Once on the open road, the faster cars at the front of the convoy picked up speed and moved away from the tail end, and soon Kon was out of radio range of the support vehicles.

The police eventually allowed the support cars to pass the slower vehicles, to try to catch the leading cars. A short time later we discovered that a railway crossing on the intended route was blocked. So now, not only were we out of radio contact, but we also did not know where our solar car had gone. Then the shock. Our second support car, driven by David Sims Williams, received a desperate phone call from Kon to say that Aurora 101 was on fire, and was burning fiercely.

We took a detour around the blocked route and continued to search for Kon and the car. Twenty minutes later we saw clouds of black smoke ahead. When we arrived at the scene, the burning remains of the car were sitting on the roadway. An adjacent grass fire has started, and four fire trucks and a helicopter were in attendance. Almost nothing was left of the Aurora 101 solar car except for an intense flame from the front as the magnesium housing of the wheel motor burnt away. Total destruction.

So little was left that it has been impossible to trace the cause. One of the following vehicle drivers had smelt burning

and seen some black smoke coming from the front wheel housing. Kon also noticed a haze developing inside the car, though everything else seemed to be normal. He pulled up, and got out of the car, assisted by the police escort. Once out of the car, he could not get to the fire extinguisher, so he and police could do nothing but watch the fire spread throughout the car.

As things cooled down, we picked through the remains for a few blackened souvenirs. The fire crew then swept the remaining ashes off the road. This was the end of the car that, in the period from 1996 to 2006, had achieved more than any other solar car in the world.

The team members were in shock over the total destruction. The losses included the solar panels, our best wheel motor, and all of the electronics which were to be transferred to the next Aurora solar car. The fire was also an extremely sobering experience for the other entrants in the event, and for the organisers.

The Aurora team, after contacting family and friends in Australia, decided to continue to travel with the event until it finished.

Day 4 ended with a display at Vilafant. Our contribution was a bucket of burnt-out bits with an Australian flag in it.

Tomorrow, we will watch the other entrants tackle the mountains without any worries about motor temperature.
