

REPORT FOR SUNDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2009

We wish to lead with the headline “Aurora leads Nuna at the end of Day 1” But it has been a much more difficult day for both of these teams and an excellent day for the Japanese entrants.

Darwin put on a clear sunny day for the start of the 2009 Global green Challenge. The 32 remaining entrants for the solar challenge were put in starting order adjacent to the Parliament House starting line. A good crowd had their opportunity to see the world’s fastest solar cars close up. This was a truly international event and the pre race tension was not only evident but expressed in many different ways.

The band played Australia’s national anthem before the Northern Territory Chief Minister took his position to flag the teams away.

And for the first time in years it was the Australian Aurora 101 team to be the first to go.. Andris Samsons took the sleek solar car off the starting line to pick up his support cars and then to the Stuart Highway.

Already spectators were lining the highway from the best vantage points to see these remarkable cars start their 3010 km journey to Adelaide. The entire distance covered on just one road, the Stuart Highway.

The starting procedure differed from previous events. Instead of releasing the cars at one minute intervals they were gone about every 20 seconds. Surprisingly this caused traffic like in peak hour on the two lane Stuart Highway as the full convoys for each team found some road space.

Both Aurora cars had brief stops in this section before settling down to the task of getting to Katherine for the first official media stop of 30 minutes. Peter Pudney finally called for a speed of 94 km/hr whilst further back Jack MacArthur wanted to see 96 km/hr in Southern Aurora.

Somehow the glistening new supercar from Tokai University in Japan to the lead position but Aurora 101 was ahead of all other contenders

After the first hour on the road the order for the first bunch was Tokai, Aurora101, Umicore, Michigan and Nuna. After another 30 minutes, Aurora was fifth in this group as the much superior solar power in the other 4 cars asserted itself.

The leading Adventure Class car, OSU was next but 15 minutes behind. Then a further 10 minute gap to Southern Aurora, MIT, Twente, Stanford and Principia.. This field was starting to spread out and the slower cars were already up to an hour behind.

Then trouble hit Southern Aurora. About 100 km to run before Katherine it was stopped by the side of the road with weird noises from the motor. As it turned out it was a breakdown in the motor controller that had gone over-current in the low speed phase. A spare motor controller was packed with the Aurora 101 so the question was how to get it. It was looking like a trailering job to the overnight stopping point where Southern Aurora could be met.

Unfortunately it was all a lot easier because only 20 km further on Aurora 101 had met its own disaster. It lay of the side of the road with a broken front suspension locator. At about 11.30 AM the car suffered a tire blowout. Andris controlled the car sufficiently to avoid a full 360 degree spin on the highway itself but in doing so broke off the A frame that locates the triangular chassis in the car. This was serious repair work. An advance party was sent to Katherine to find a workshop willing to help make these repairs. [On a sleepy Sunday afternoon in Katherine, get it!]

A place was found. Katherine Auto Body 89710923 where employee Tim McKelvie was working. Soon two solar car teams were occupying the yard and repairs proceeded. The spare motor controller worked with a bit of recalibration. New parts were made for the front suspension locator and both screwed and glued in place. All of this took several hours so the teams decided to stay in comfort at a Katherine caravan park then take the solar cars to where each had broken down to rejoin the event at 8.00 AM on

Monday morning. Time lost was about 6 hours. There is still a chance to do well in the Silicon Challenge Class and the Adventure Class providing all goes well.

At the front of the field the news was also disastrous. Tokai came through Katherine with just a 1 minute lead over Umicore. As they went further on Umicore attempted to pass Tokai on the open road, were caught in the wind, drove off the track and completely destroyed their car by hitting a tree. At the following media stop in Dunmarra Tokai retained the lead by 17 minutes over Michigan then OSU and Nuna. Nuna had dropped back by over an hour from the leader. Had Aurora stayed in running condition it may have been leading Nuna at the end of Day 1. Just dreaming!

Maybe we will make Katherine tomorrow. Such a long way to go.

