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Sunseeker team wins sportsmanship award and more at 2008 NASC

Last week the CEAS offered a welcome lunch and ceremony for the 14-member WMU Sunseeker team that won the Sportsmanship Award at 2008 North American Solar Challenge (NASC), an intercollegiate 2,400-mile race from Texas to Calgary, Canada.



2008 Sunseeker Team (L-R): Front: **Edmund Tan, Lyth Alobiedat, Nicholas Killoran, Alex Hoeksema** (in driver's seat), **Brendan Hill, David Ludens, and Abraham Poot**; Back: **John Kapenga, Paul Engelmann, Kevin Kalchik, Adrian Sargent, Dan Gore, Madeline McAuley, Ian Smith, Steve Mohney, and Chris Rocker**

For this year's Sunseeker team, the road to the 2008 NASC was fraught with obstacles in funding, material procurement, and design and development. In the final months, the team worked day and night – sometimes camping out in study areas at the Parkview Campus – to complete the WMU entry unveiled last month.

A seemingly final blow came from a wind burst that destroyed a solar panel array during qualification trials and eliminated the vehicle from this year's competition. However, the wind didn't eliminate the team, who were invited to join teams that qualified for the race. They put their skills to work and gained a wealth of experience.

While the Sunseeker advisors and three team members drove and displayed Sunseeker at the race checkpoints, 10 WMU students joined the teams of the University of Michigan, Iowa State University, Northwestern and Waterloo universities, and the Missouri University of Science and Technology.

Alex Hoeksema, a junior in electrical engineering, worked with the Iowa State team. "Even though we couldn't race, we could help everyone else," he said. He helped fix a brake problem that almost eliminated the Iowa team. "They had to re-qualify because the brakes failed before they reached the first stop," he said. "Their callipers were the same kind that we use, so I was able to get our team to give them a hand getting parts and meeting the deadline to get back in the race."

According to Hoeksema, one value of the competition is the mutual support of its competitors. "All the teams helped each other every night of the race," he said.



2008 Sunseeker team enjoys welcome-home luncheon and awards ceremony



David Ludens, Madeline McAuley, and Kevin Kalchik with 2008 Sunseeker

The WMU students gained an abundance of hands-on experience. "You learn a lot in the classroom, but trouble shooting and solving problems in the field gave me an education you can't get in a classroom," Hoeksema said. "I put what I learned to work."

Dr. Paul Engelmann, Department of Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering (IME) chair and a member of the Sunseeker team, called this year's team "the very best of what the college has to offer." He said the team had – through no fault of its own – met obstacles at every turn. "Lesser teams would have given this up many times, and no one would have blamed them for quitting," he said. "But this team persisted and thrived and won the sportsmanship award."

Abraham Poot, engineering lab coordinator for both IME and the Department of Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering (MAE) and a Sunseeker advisor, said that the team is "fired up" for next year's solar competitions. "The team plans to fix this car and take it to the Formula Sun track race next May in Texas," he said. "They would also like to re-build a car for the World Solar Challenge in Australia set for the third week in October 2009."

Hoeksema and **Nicholas Killoran**, a mechanical engineering junior, will serve as next year's project leaders. This year's project leader, **David Ludens**, who earned his bachelor's in aeronautical engineering this spring, will be in constant communication with the new team. "There is no way I could write down everything I've learned from this project," he said.

For more information on Sunseeker and its future endeavors, check out www.wmich.edu/sunseeker

Send your thoughts or suggestions for future topics to the editor at jerrie.fiala@wmich.edu Thank you.