

Wits team seeks sponsors to finish building sun dog

A team of students from Wits University are racing to find sponsorship and finish building their "sun dog" in time for the Sasol Solar Challenge.

Every two years, teams of students from tertiary institutions in South Africa and overseas design and build solar-powered vehicles to compete in the Sasol Solar Challenge, which covers 5400km of variable South African terrain. The race is the longest of its kind anywhere in the world.

In 2012, a Wits team competed in the challenge for the first time and finished fourth. The 2014 event will be the fourth Sasol Solar Challenge and Wits is planning to compete using a brand new vehicle - the Parhelion which is being built largely by the School of Mechanical, Industrial and Aeronautical Engineering.

The name "Parhelion" was inspired by a phenomenon of the sun, which results in the formation of a halo or circular rainbow around the sun. The common term for this phenomenon is "sun dog".

Showcase the feasibility of renewable energy

According to team leader Bradley Rautenbach, the Wits team wants to push the boundaries of technology and showcase the feasibility of renewable energy in the transport and energy sectors. The Parhelion is designed to optimise energy from sunlight using a semi-monocoque carbon fibre chassis, along with latest generation lithium-ion batteries, which will ensure that the car is extremely lightweight.

The next race will take place in September 2014. According to the new rules proposed by the organisers, the cars have to compete in a track event about three months before the main event. To have a car ready for the 2014 event the Wits team is on a tight schedule.

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