



AVE: 20280.29 (ZAR)

Cross-winds buffet solar cars

GABI FALANGA

gabi.falanga@inl.co.za

STEEP hills, evolving strategies and winds playing havoc have been some of the issues facing teams over the past few days of the Sasol Solar Challenge.

Yesterday, on day six of the event, challenge leaders Nuon Solar Team of the Netherlands were caught off guard when a strong gust of wind blew off the canopy of their car's cockpit, cracking it, near Humansdorp in the Eastern Cape.

"It was a shock to us all," said the team's Sarah Bennink Bolt. "Thank goodness nothing worse happened. It could've smashed the solar panel."

The driver at the time, Wouter Grimme, was not injured.

The North East University team from the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus had to tow their solar car most of the way. "We were a bit scared with the wind today. We were thinking the cross-winds were too strong to drive," said the team's Ersin Aytac.

All the teams have had to adjust their strategies regularly over the past three days as they've been faced with winds of up to 50km/h,

steep hills and pockets of traffic.

Both Nuon and the Hungarian team, GAMF, had their cars pulled over by traffic police on Wednesday night while driving into Port Elizabeth to the overnight stop.

Challenge officials had to intervene after the Nelson Mandela Bay traffic police wouldn't let the teams continue, even after seeing their official papers confirming their roadworthiness and permission to drive on the roads.

As teams prepared to tackle the last two days, event director Winstone Jordaan said the slightest mistake or accident could cost one of the top teams their position.

By the time the teams reached Sedgefield in the Western Cape last night, both Nuon and the Japanese Tokai University Solar Team had clocked 544.1km. Nuon remained in the lead with a total of 3 787km.

The top four teams – Nuon, Tokai, GAMF and South Africa's North-West University – were all close to breaking the record for the furthest distance travelled by a solar car. "It's very close and the top teams are still very competitive. For a change in position we will need an upset in one of the teams," said Jordaan.

@Gabi_Falanga



LAST-MINUTE CHECK: A Tokai Challenger teammate of Japan ensures that their solar car is ready for the next leg of their journey, which involved steep hills and strong winds.

PICTURE: © BARRY ALDWORTH / EXPECT LIFE