

MIZZOU

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Around the Columns

Little car, big mileage

With sustainability in mind, College of Engineering students had been designing, building and racing futuristic solar cars for more than a decade. Then in 2005, the solar car team looked at hydrogen, saw a fuel for the future and swapped sunlight for the big H.

Hydrogen is efficient and clean, says senior engineering major Forrest Meyen of Eagle River, Alaska, president of the new hydrogen car team. Rather than spewing exhaust like gasoline engines, hydrogen fuel cells produce electricity to run a motor, and they give off only water and heat.

In March 2010, students took their second-generation car to the Shell Eco-Marathon in Houston, where it was the only hydrogen-powered entry in the Urban Concept Division. The task was to create a car that is not only fuel-efficient but also road-worthy. For instance, cars had to have four wheels, a steering wheel, headlights, taillights, doors, a brake pedal and storage. Mizzou's \$70,000 car is aerodynamic, weighs 336 pounds and was one of the few entries with a suspension system, which makes it safer and comfier.

But along the way, the team hit a few bumps, Meyen says. For instance, during final testing the morning before leaving for the race, the car's drive shaft broke. In just five hours, the team designed and manufactured a more robust shaft and hit the road. Despite breakdowns during the competition, Meyen and the team had some rewards.

"When you're driving, it feels like you're strapped into a spaceship," Meyen says. "The motor hardly makes any noise, and you're so low to the ground that it feels faster than you're really going." And, oh yeah, it gets the equivalent of 480 miles per gallon of gasoline.



Mizzou engineering students built a hydrogen-powered car from the wheels up. Photo by Nicholas Benner

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Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916
| E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

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