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Cal Poly Supermileage Racer Takes Silver at International Competition

SAN LUIS OBISPO – At a whopping 2,752.3 miles per gallon, Cal Poly's 2008 'Supermileage' car finished second place at this year's international Shell Eco-Marathon Americas competition.

The event brings student teams from around the world to compete in the high-mileage, fuel-saving prototype vehicles they have designed over the past year.

The test vehicles were powered by combustion engines, fuel cell/hydrogen technology, diesel fuel, liquid petroleum gas and solar power. The 2008 competition took place April 11-12 at the California Speedway track in Fontana.

Cal Poly went into the 2008 competition as the returning champion and finished in second place in a field of 27 teams from 23 universities and four high schools from across the United States, Canada and Mexico. The Cal Poly Supermileage Team and car performed at 2,752.3 mpg.



Cal Poly's supermileage car, the Black Widow, sported a new top and hardware for the 2008 competition. The Black Widow was an improved version of the 92-pound vehicle that took first place in the 2007 competition, with an impressive 1,902.7 mpg.

First and third place were claimed by two teams fielded by Mater Dei High School from Evansville, Ind. Mater Dei's first place car reached 2,843.4 mpg; their third-place car reached 2,383.8 mpg.

But the win was controversial. Strong winds during two of the three-day competition in Fontana helped propel the Mater Dei vehicles. On some track runs the vehicles rounded the track without having to turn on their engines, though those runs were disqualified by competition officials.

"The wind hurt everybody but Mater Dai," said Cal Poly team leader David Ulrich. "They were shaped such that the wind would push them forward. Our car had many technical improvements that increased our mileage over last year. Given no wind conditions, we definitely would have performed better, so next year we hope for better weather conditions and then maybe we can take the title back."

The Supermileage Team has been working on Black Widow since September 2007. The team was started by seven students four years ago. It currently has 14 members, 12 of whom attended the competition this year. All five returning members to the team from last year are graduating this year, including Ulrich.

"It's really a transition year," Ulrich said. "It started off with a group of friends. We've grown up from the dorms over the past five years, and we started the team our third year. Now we have a true team with new members and we're just trying to pass on our knowledge and improve even more next year."

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Editors please note: for jpgs of the 2008 Cal Poly Supermileage car and team, e-mail polynews@calpoly.edu.

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