

AGGIE life

FRIDAY
March 22, 1996

Powered by the sun

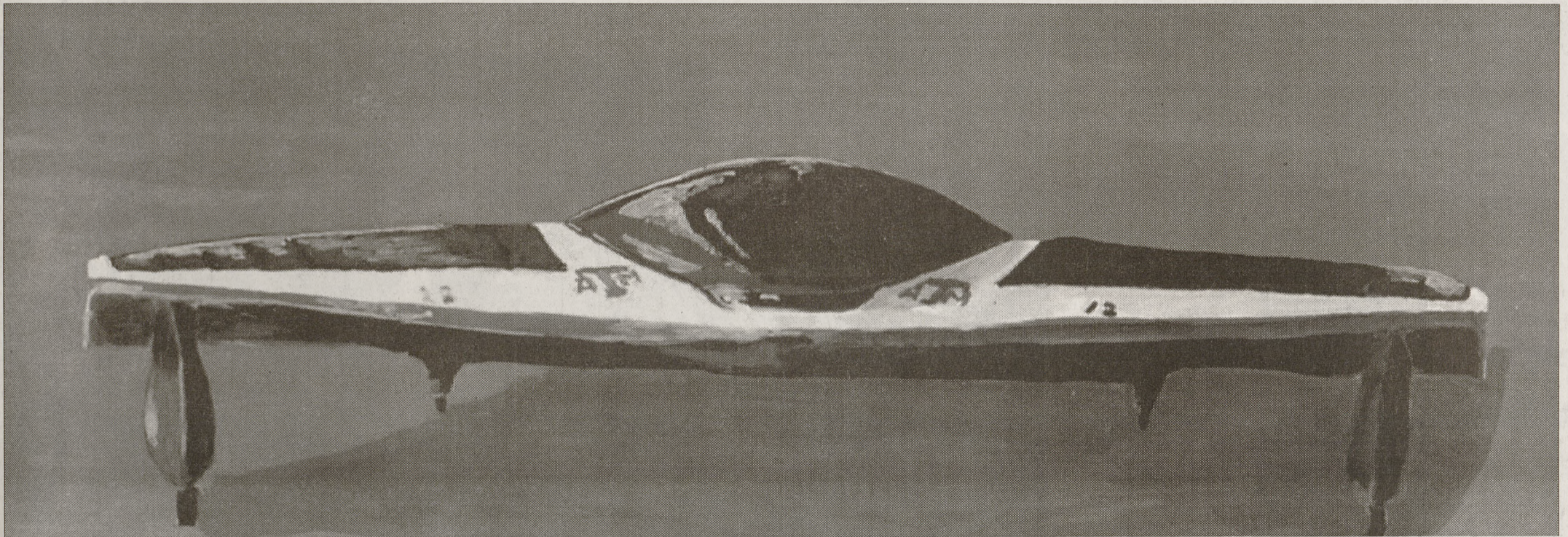


Photo courtesy of the A&M Sun Raycer Club

A sketch of the Texas A&M Sun Raycer Club's solar-powered car shows what the group will build to race in Sun Rayce, a national nine-day race from Indianapolis to Golden, Colo.

Sun Raycer Club sets sights on building winning solar-powered car

By Kristina Buffin
THE BATTALION

As society strives to find alternative fuels to replace fossil fuels, the Texas A&M Sun Raycer Club is doing its part by building a car that runs solely on solar power.

Every two years, there is a national competition, Sun Rayce, which invites college students to build solar-powered vehicles for a nine-day race from Indianapolis to Golden, Colo.

The A&M club is comprised of 15-20 members and five professors. The team entered the 1995 race as part of a senior design project.

However, Blake Jennings, co-president and a junior mechanical engineering major, said that because of monetary constraints, the students decided to form a club through the Memorial Student Center.

"Money was primarily the reason because we had no other choice," Jennings said. "Through the University, we were allowed to have our own bank account, and to enter the contest, you had to be a university team."

Some of the biggest engineering schools in the nation enter the contest. Universities such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the University of Texas are in the competition. In 1995, MIT won the race, and A&M finished in the top 30.

Tim Uno, a sophomore mechanical engineering major, said A&M has a good chance of placing first in 1997 if they can raise the necessary money to build the car and get more people involved.

"We will definitely qualify," Uno said. "We should at least be in the top third. I think that if we continue going where we are going right now and get more people and money involved, we could win. We are aiming to win, and I think it is a realistic goal."

Most teams have budgets of over \$1 million. A&M's budget in 1995 was \$35,000 whereas the 1993 winners, the University of Michigan, worked on a budget of \$1.2 million.

This year, A&M is hoping to raise \$300,000 through corporate sponsorships.

"It will take us about a month to build a new car," Jennings said. "A lot of our planning depends on the money. We need the

materials and the people in each specialized area to help build the car."

While some students use the experience to help build their résumés, Jennings said the competition is a matter of prestige and pride.

"It will be shown on the world news, so it will get a lot of publicity," Jennings said. "Personally, I am doing it to get experience, but it is a lot of fun, and it is tough competition. Unless you enjoy it, there is no point. It is like taking one or two extra classes."

Dennis Waugamen, adviser to the club and an associate professor of engineering technology, said the competition enables engineering students to use their classroom knowledge in practical situations.

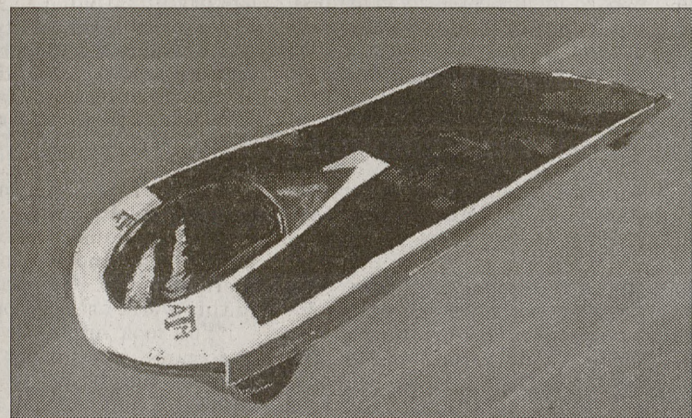
"It teaches problem solving, organizational and system engineering, and specific mechanic and electrical engineering problem solving," Waugamen said. "It gives them first-hand experience working with engineering problems and taking a project from the concept stage to the implementation. It also involves the challenge of competing."

It is the practical nature of the project which attracted most of the members of the team. Uno said building the car involves more than math and physics. He said it also involves hands-on experience.

"There is so much more involved in designing a car," Uno said. "We are progressing steadily, and we are trying to do a lot at once, but we have made a lot of contacts. The faculty have been really helpful, but we need more people with experience in other fields."

Waugamen said the team is nothing but enthusiastic and is ready to create a car which will win in 1997.

"There is the excitement of the project and the mechanical and electrical problems to be solved," Waugamen said. "The interest is to create a highly technical vehicle and compete."



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