

## Formula Zero begins - the historic first Hydrogen Fuel Cell Race

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August 31, 2008 **Formula Zero** is the world's first **hydrogen fuel cell** racing series and the historic first ever event was held last weekend in Rotterdam. Four teams clearly stood out from the field in vying for the celebrated first ever victory for a fuel cell racing machine, with the **Dutch Greenchoice-FORZE Team** (Technical University of Delft) setting the fastest time of 38.416 seconds of the portable **racetrack** in Saturday's qualifying, narrowly ahead of Spain's **EuplatechH2** (Escuela Universitaria Politécnica La Almunia de Doña Godina). Sadly, the speed shown by the **Belgian Zero Emission Racing Team** on Friday (37.800) did not materialize on Sunday, and the **British Imperial Racing Green Team**'s reliability over race distance did not stand up well in the non-traditional **FORMULA ZERO race format**. Though Team FORZE won the main race on Sunday, the Spaniards won the initial sprint race, and will go down in history as the winners of the first fuel cell racing event.



Team FORZE on track - but for a few tenths of a second, history in the making.

[Image Gallery \( 22 Images \)](#)

In the end, the Sprint Race, which was the first ever fuel cell race to be conducted, went to the Spanish Euplatech team, and the ensuing Main race was taken out by the home Dutch **FORZE** team. With the **Hydrogen Economy** set to overtake the world, the event truly was landmark and we expect the series will go on to become a mainstay of the future of motorsport. Though only six teams competed in the first event, we expect that a few years from now, a position on the starting grid will be highly coveted and frightfully costly as international manufacturers seek to prove the reliability and speed of their roadgoing fuel cell technologies.

For now, the karts that competed in this first event of the **Formula Zero 2008 Championship** are relatively small and humble in racing terms. Though constructed largely of **carbon fibre** and borrowing heavily from top-flight **kart racing** running gear, not one of the vehicles managed to complete the weekend trouble free. As in the original automobile races of 100 years ago, this is the dawn of a new era and there is no question that every team will benefit from its first serious outing and learn from the experience.

By the time the teams line up in South Carolina for the beginning of the 2009 season, we fully expect the reliability will have improved significantly, and the 145 km/h top speed and 30 **horsepower** of the leading contenders will have jumped significantly.

The Formula Zero racing competition operates under the guidance of the Alternative Energies Commission of the governing body of all motorsport, the **Federation Internationale de L'Automobile**.

The organizers are using the inaugural season as a first step toward a full-scale, zero-emission, hydrogen fuel-cell Formula Zero race event. Each season, the size—and speed—of the vehicles will increase, with the intent of demonstrating the commercial viability of this promising new technology. And, all the hydrogen used in the race must come from a sustainable, renewable source. The inaugural season began last weekend and is likely at this stage to consist of just two race meetings, with the second due to be held on **September 21 in Amsterdam**.

In keeping with the ambitious plans for the formula, the second race season of 2009 will see the formula venture internationally, with the first event planned for March 28 and 29, 2009 as a kickoff to the week-long, 20th Anniversary **NHA Conference and Hydrogen Expo**.

Each university student team is responsible for designing and building their Formula Zero kart to meet performance and safety specifications, securing sponsorships and raising funds for expenses relating to the competition, including transporting the vehicle and team members to the races.

History will record that the first team to win a hydrogen racing event was the **Spanish EuplatechH2 team** in a shoot-out with the Dutch. In the Final Round, the Dutch team went first, and set a very quick lap of 37.956 seconds. EuplatechH2, unfazed by the solid time posted by the Dutch team, went out next and recorded a lap of 37.784 to sneak by with the win. The Spanish team celebrated loudly in front of their pit area while their driver ran a victory lap carrying the Spanish flag (don't try this at Nurburgring). The battle for the final step on the podium was won by the Belgian team when the British team was unable to start their run within the allotted 5 minute grace period.

In the main race, which consisted of a three-round bracket eliminations with six lap runs, went to the Dutch **FORZE** team. **The Solvay Umicore Zero Emission Racing Team** from Belgium recorded the fastest lap in the Semi-Final Round, but just missed victory in the Final.

An honourable mention should go to the **Lawrence Tech Element One team** which competed unsuccessfully in the initial event, but ominously comes from the State of Michigan, home of motor city, Detroit. The team is hopeful that its involvement in the 08-09 competition will be the first of many, and will create opportunities to further public awareness and industry support of hydrogen fuel-cell technology in the United States, particularly in Detroit.

Similarly, the other team from North America, fielded by **UCLA**, is likely to have the same type of commercial backing available that drove the competitive aspirations of the leading contenders in the recent DARPA Urban Challenge. When the commercial forces that will shape the inevitable coming of big business to hydrogen racing look to choose their partners, the two US-based teams will not be short of friends or funding. Both will almost certainly translate their initial first efforts on a shoestring into significant commercial endeavours over time!

Finally, congratulations to **the small and dedicated team** which created **Formula Zero** – the team's foresight has already created an international awareness and it's only the beginning.

From little acorns ....