

UM's new solar car marks transition for nation's top team

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The name of the University of Michigan's next solar car, which will be one step closer to resembling a real-world vehicle, is "Generation," the U-M solar car team announced today at the South by Southwest Interactive festival in Austin, Texas.

U-M's national champion team is designing the vehicle that will race in the 2013 World Solar Challenge across Australia in October. New contest regulations will make the entries a bit more like cars you see on the road—though practical solar-powered cars are not exactly on the horizon.

This year's entries must have four wheels instead of three, a broader [field of vision](#) for the driver, and a seat that's higher than the driver's feet. Over the course of the race's development more than 20 years ago, drivers have gone from lying down to seated, and now their posture must be further refined.

To mark these transitions, the team is departing from a decade-long naming convention. Since 2003, [solar car](#) monikers have ended in "um," for U-M. There was SpectrUM, followed by Momentum, Continuum, Infinium, and finally Quantum.

"First of all, we were running out of U-M words, or at least good ones," said Eric Hausman, team project manager and a junior in industrial and operations engineering. "But the race regulations are such a major change, it made sense to signify them like this."

"Generation," the team's 12th-generation vehicle, nods to the thousands of alumni and students since 1990 who have built the team into the powerhouse it is today. Reigning national champions, U-M's team has finished first in the North [American Solar Challenge](#) seven times. It has come in third in the World Solar Challenge five times.

This year's team has a tough road ahead, Hausman says.

"On top of the general challenges of building a new solar car and having a new team, we're basically starting with a blank slate because of the new regulations," he said. "Every year there are iterations and the cars get better, but to start from scratch is completely different than to iterate."

The team has described its cars as "ultimate electric vehicles," as they run off a battery charged by sunlight. So while solar cars aren't going to be viable any time soon, there are other more immediate applications for the technologies the teams develop, working in close collaboration with industry.

"The technologies in the car are things we expect to see on the road in the next decade, such as a super lightweight carbon fiber body, a high performance battery and a motor that's 98 percent efficient," said Chris Hilger, the 2011 team's business manager who has retired from the team.

The 2011-12 car from Hilger's team is on display this week at the South by Southwest Interactive festival.

The [World Solar Challenge](#) is Oct. 6-13, 2013, from Darwin, Australia on the northern part of the continent to Adelaide in the south. The team will unveil its new car in June. With more than 100 members from schools and colleges across the university, the U-M [Solar Car Team](#) is one of the largest student organizations on campus.

More information: The official U-M Solar website:
www.umsolar.com

Provided by University of Michigan

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