Purdue's solar car shines

Purdue University once again had a first place showing over the weekend during the 2012 Shell Eco-marathon.

The goal of the annual event, held in Houston, is to create the most fuel-efficient vehicles. Students from the Purdue Solar Racing team took their $100,000 solar car, Celeritas, to the competition and outperformed their previous mark.

By the end of the event, Purdue won the Solar Urban Concept category of the competition, achieving an efficiency equivalent to 2,325 miles per gallon. Last year, they won the category with an output of to 2,175 miles per gallon.

"It's just a testament to how hard we worked," Zack Lapetina, a junior and president of Purdue Solar Racing, said Sunday afternoon. "The biggest improvement to the car is something you can't see. We greatly enhanced our software."

The Purdue Solar Racing team has about 50 members, but just 15 traveled to Houston, Lapetina said.

While the group was working hard to beat last year’s impressive mark, they also were given the chance to enjoy the other aspects of the competition and interact with other students.

Other energy categories included gasoline, battery powered, diesel and hydrogen.

According to the Purdue Solar Racing website, the university's solar racing history dates back to 1991. Celeritas, which was powered by 220 solar panels at this year's competition, is the team's eighth car.

But the team already is looking ahead to next year's competition and its ninth design.

"We've already started designing next year's car," Lapetina said. "It's a long process."

The competition ran from Thursday to Sunday. There are 131 vehicles from 112 teams from 39 high schools and 46 universities from the United States, Brazil, Canada and Mexico taking part.