

Collegiate Teams Travel 1,500+ Miles on Solar Power Across US Heartland as Part of America's 250th Anniversary

2026 Electrek American Solar Challenge, Supporting Partner of America250 and Route 66 Centennial Project, marks 25 years since first traveling Historic Route 66

MN, UNITED STATES, June 24, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The 2026 [Electrek Formula Sun Grand Prix](#) and [Electrek American Solar Challenge](#) are on track to be the largest field in the program's history. Collegiate

engineering teams from across the United States, joined by international entries from Canada, Belgium, and the Netherlands, will compete this summer across the American heartland.



Teams line up with their solar cars for a group portrait

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Gail Lueck, Innovators Educational Foundation

The event arrives at a rare convergence of anniversaries: 2026 marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the centennial of the designation of Route 66, and the 25th anniversary of the American Solar Challenge first traveling the Route 66 corridor. The Electrek American Solar Challenge has been named an Official Route 66 Centennial Project and is a supporting partner of [America250](#), the national, nonpartisan organization charged by Congress to lead the commemoration of the signing of the Declaration of Independence — situating the 2026 event at the

intersection of American invention, infrastructure, and engineering education.

The series opens with the Electrek Formula Sun Grand Prix (FSGP), July 21–23, 2026, marking FSGP's first year at Brainerd International Raceway in Brainerd, Minnesota. Teams that pass technical and safety inspections and meet on-track benchmarks qualify for the Electrek American Solar Challenge (ASC), July 25–August 1, 2026 — a cross-country event tracing the Great

River Road and historic Route 66 through the American heartland.

Both events test engineering and endurance. At FSGP, cars complete as many laps as possible on a closed track; ASC sends qualifying vehicles onto public roads to cover hundreds of miles stage by stage, running on sunlight and the energy their teams have learned to store and spend. Behind every car are thousands of hours of student engineering — part competition, part rolling laboratory.

That rigor feeds directly into the commercial pipeline. The skills students master — battery and solar integration, vehicle dynamics, systems engineering, and energy efficiency — are why recruiting partners include Tesla, SpaceX, Wattch, and Blue Origin, and why these events serve as a launch pad into students' careers.

"Team registrations this year are shaping up to be the largest field we've seen, and we're excited to bring the Electrek Formula Sun Grand Prix to Brainerd International Raceway for the first time," said Gail Lueck, Event Director and Operations Director, Innovators Educational Foundation.

"Every solar car that arrives at the track represents thousands of college student hours of engineering, manufacturing, fundraising, and more. Then those vehicles must pass a scrutineering inspection process and qualify during the track event to participate in the Electrek American Solar Challenge — which first traveled Route 66 twenty-five years ago."

"America's 250th anniversary is an opportunity to celebrate the ingenuity, innovation, and determination that have driven our nation forward for generations," said Jen Condon, Executive Vice President of America250. "The Electrek American Solar Challenge showcases the talent and creativity of the next generation of engineers while honoring America's legacy of exploration and technological progress, making it a fitting part of the Semiquincentennial celebration."



The University of Illinois' solar car "Calypso" (No. 22), built by the collegiate solar car team, shares a public road with everyday traffic as it passes the Tennessee State Capitol during the 2024 Electrek American Solar Challenge — a student-engineered vehicle



Collegiate solar car teams and their vehicles gather with national and team flags for the event's traditional all-teams aerial photo — a field that travels from across the U.S. and internationally to compete.

"Route 66 has always represented innovation, movement, and the spirit of exploration," said Bill Thomas, Chair of the Route 66 Road Ahead Partnership and Commissioner for the Route 66 Centennial Commission. "Seeing collegiate teams travel this historic corridor powered entirely by the sun is a powerful reminder that the Mother Road is still a living laboratory for American ingenuity. As we celebrate 100 years of Route 66 and look toward the next century, this project connects our shared history with the future of clean transportation and engineering excellence."

About Electrek Formula Sun Grand Prix (FSGP)

FSGP is an annual three-day solar vehicle track race. The 2026 event marks FSGP's first year at Brainerd International Raceway in Brainerd, Minnesota. Teams must successfully complete a multi-day technical and safety inspection process — known as scrutineering — before earning the right to take to the track. In addition to crowning track winners, FSGP serves as the qualifying event for the Electrek American Solar Challenge.

About Electrek American Solar Challenge (ASC)

ASC is a multi-day, cross-country solar vehicle event held every two years. Solar-powered vehicles travel a fixed route over multiple stages, with overnight checkpoints in host cities along the way. The 2026 route follows the Great River Road and historic Route 66 corridor through the American heartland.

2026 Confirmed Partners & Sponsors

Title Sponsor: Electrek

Track Partner: Brainerd International Raceway

Presenting Partner: Siemens — presenting partner of the Siemens Challenge, a \$10,000 design competition awarded to the top-performing team in an onsite engineering challenge at the track

Sponsors: Ansys, Blue Origin, Generac, IOSiX, MathWorks, Caterpillar, Donaldson, La Macuca LLC, SunCat Solar, SpaceX, Tesla, Wattch, SolCast

About America250

America250 is the national nonpartisan initiative working to engage every American in celebrating and commemorating the Semiquincentennial, the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. It is spearheaded by the congressionally-appointed U.S. Semiquincentennial Commission and its sole-supporting nonprofit organization, America250.org, Inc., together known as America250. This multi-year effort kicked off with America's Invitation on July 4, 2023: a national public engagement campaign inviting all Americans to share their stories and their hopes and dreams for the future of this country.

Leading up to July 4, 2026, America250 is working to provide opportunities for all Americans to pause and reflect on our nation's past, honor the contributions of all Americans, and look to the future we want to create for the next generation and beyond. To learn more, visit America250.org.

About Innovators Educational Foundation (IEF)

IEF is a nonprofit organization that organizes and operates the Formula Sun Grand Prix and the American Solar Challenge to advance hands-on engineering education and accelerate the development of solar and electric vehicle technology. Founded by volunteers from across the solar vehicle community, IEF has been a launching pad for engineers now working at the leading edge of the clean energy and aerospace industries. More information is available at www.americansolarchallenge.org.

The Formula Sun Grand Prix is not in any way associated or affiliated with the Formula 1 companies, FORMULA 1 racing, or the FIA Formula One World Championship.

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