

# Appalachian State, KU Leuven Win 2026 Electrek American Solar Challenge as Student Solar Cars Finish Cross-Country Trek

*Student-built solar cars from North America and Europe traveled 1,500+ miles on sunlight alone, showcasing next-generation clean-energy engineering.*

AMARILLO, TX, UNITED STATES, August 5, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- After a multi-day journey powered by the sun and student engineering, the [2026 Electrek American Solar Challenge](#) concluded Saturday in Amarillo, capping one of the most competitive cross-country events in the program's history.



Appalachian State Crosses the Finish Line

The Electrek American Solar Challenge, a collegiate challenge, sees teams attempt a public-road journey of more than 1,500 miles, testing student-designed and student-built solar vehicles against distance, weather, and the limits of energy efficiency. Organized by the Innovators

Educational Foundation (IEF), the event challenges teams to complete a fixed base route and a series of optional loops on the power of the sun alone — a test of engineering, energy strategy, and endurance that unfolds over four stages and hundreds of miles.

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Battling hills, clouds, and extreme heat across 8 states in 8 days, teams went from 39 arrivals to 18 at the Minneapolis start to 14 solar cars crossing the Amarillo finish—a record-setting year.”

*Gail Lueck, Event Director and Operations Director, IEF*

[This year, that test came down to two champions.](#) KU Leuven of Belgium (Car #8) claimed the Single-Occupant Vehicle (SOV) title, and Appalachian State University (Car #828) won the Multi-Occupant Vehicle (MOV) class. Seven teams completed the entire 1,547-mile base route. A single-occupant finish measured in minutes The SOV class produced one of the closest finishes in

recent memory. KU Leuven took the win with 2,671.2 official miles and an official time of

62:07:02, averaging 43.4 mph. TU Delft of the Netherlands (Car #30) pushed them to the line, matching KU Leuven's 43.4 mph average and finishing just under four minutes back on official time at 62:11:01.

The two European powerhouses were nearly inseparable on the road — TU Delft actually completed a fraction more loop mileage — and the final margin came down to penalties. École de technologie supérieure (ÉTS) of Montréal (Car #92) rounded out the podium in third with 2,443.9 official miles and the class's cleanest run, taking just 10 miles of deductions.

#### Single-Occupant Vehicle (SOV) Class Podium

#8 KU Leuven (Belgium) — 2,671.2 official miles; 62:07:02; 43.4 mph average

#30 TU Delft (Netherlands) — 2,535.5 official miles; 62:11:01; 43.4 mph average

#92 ÉTS – Montréal — 2,443.9 official miles; 60:54:06; 40.3 mph average

Appalachian State wins the multi-occupant class on smarts, not just miles

The MOV class rewards more than distance. Teams are scored on a formula that weighs distance completed (40%), an optimization score based on person-miles carried per unit of external energy charged (40%), and a practicality score judged in Minneapolis (20%).

That balance defined the outcome. Appalachian State took first with a class-leading score of 92.7, edging Polytechnique Montréal (Car #55) at 88.8 — even though Poly Montréal actually covered the most ground in the class at 1,983.6 miles. App State's combination of energy efficiency and a top practicality score carried the day. Georgia Tech (Car #49) finished third at 87.2, posting the highest passenger occupancy in the field.

#### Multi-Occupant Vehicle (MOV) Class Podium

#828 Appalachian State — score 92.7 (1,829.6 miles logged)



KU Leuven Team Winning the SOV Class



Teams at the American Solar Challenge Start Line

#55 Polytechnique Montréal — score 88.8 (1,983.6 miles logged)

#49 Georgia Tech — score 87.2 (1,622.4 miles logged)

This year's route carried the field south from the Minneapolis area, where teams first earned their place on the road at the [Electrek Formula Sun Grand Prix](#) — a closed-track qualifying event — before setting out cross-country. Over four stages, the caravan traveled through the Midwest and traced stretches of historic Route 66 through Oklahoma and Texas, converging on the finish in Amarillo. Along the way, teams navigated checkpoints, optional challenge loops, and the day-to-day strategy of managing battery, weather, and sunlight over hundreds of miles.

The Challenge closed with an awards ceremony at Arts in the Sunset in Amarillo, honoring the winning teams and the students who spent an average of 2 years designing and building the vehicles that carried them there.

The Electrek American Solar Challenge is fundamentally about what happens over the months and years before the cars ever reach the starting line. Each vehicle in this year's field represents thousands of hours of student work — designing aerodynamic bodies, engineering battery and solar-array systems, and learning the energy strategy required to cross a continent on sunlight alone.

For the students involved, the Challenge is a hands-on engineering classroom that no lecture can replicate. Teams take a vehicle from concept to on the road, cross-country machine, then manage it under real conditions: shifting weather, changing terrain, tight timing, and split-second decisions about power and pace. Those are the same skills that feed directly into the industries shaping the country's energy future — electric vehicles, battery technology, aerospace, and renewable power — making the event as much a workforce pipeline as a competition.

#### About the Formula Sun Grand Prix

The Formula Sun Grand Prix (FSGP) is an annual track competition held on grand prix or road-style closed courses. This format tests the limits of solar vehicles in handling curves, braking, and acceleration — and serves as the qualifier for the American Solar Challenge.

#### About the American Solar Challenge

The American Solar Challenge (ASC) is a multi-day, 1,500–2,000 mile cross-country endurance competition held every other year. Open to collegiate solar car teams from around the world, ASC challenges teams to operate their vehicles under real-world driving conditions and test the reliability of every onboard system.

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## About the Innovators Educational Foundation

The Innovators Educational Foundation (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](http://www.americansolarchallenge.org).

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