

# Rediscovering our Passion of Space Exploration

*Shôn Ellerton, March 9, 2023*

*I remember a time when the passion of space exploration was all the rage. What happened to it? Perhaps we have also lost the secrets from those who architected these great moments in history.*



I remember so vividly my dreams of becoming an astronaut during my early school years. I must have been around ten or so. Perhaps eleven or twelve. Can't remember exactly what age, but it was thereabouts or so. My all-time hero at the time was Neil Armstrong, the man who first walked on the moon back in 1969, and I remember a playground nearby with quite an amazing rocket structure with several levels one can climb up within, and how my friends and I used to re-enact the ritual Armstrong and his crew underwent in getting the rocket going. Being also inspired by watching *Star Trek*, we occupied the rocket structure and assigned each level appropriately, from engine rooms at the base up to the bridge at the top.

I was also heavily into making those model Estes rockets, the ones which you insert a solid fuel charge in it and then ignite it with a bit of electrical wire or a dynamite fuse, with the hope that it goes up hundreds or even thousands of feet in the air, depending on the rocket. They made for a most interesting spectacle, especially those which exploded on the pad or that one occasion in which one of my Bloodhound replica rockets shot up, made a right angle horizontally, and then made another right angle straight down to Earth at enormous speed narrowly missing our dog. It was an exciting hobby for any boy.

In short, I was obsessed with rockets and I had this strange dream that it would be just crazy and awesome if one person could get a rocket into space without the

might of NASA behind it. I used to carry around a copy of the Guinness Book of World Records everywhere we went as a family. In those days, it was a small but thick novel-sized red coloured paperback with small black and white print spanning around six hundred pages or so. It was concise but had a *lot* of stuff in it. Far more than now. And, oh yes, there was less crap in it as it is these days. For example, kid with the largest Nintendo game collection or the girl with the most tubes of lipstick. It seemed to be more nature and science focussed and, with respect to rockets and space, had many of the famous rocket pioneers, including Goddard, who made the first rocket back in 1926 and Von Braun, who led the design of the first rocket that actually got into space in 1944 with the iconic and frightening V2. Such feats seem to less impress today's generation of kids I suspect. Bottle flipping seems to be far more impressive these days. Maybe I'm showing my age.

Roll on to the present and after recently watching a documentary on Netflix called [\*Return to Space\*](#), I realised just how much we had nearly lost all interest in space travel since the end of the Space Shuttle program in 2011. I was in high school when the first Challenger space shuttle blew up after taking off killing all those on board in 1986. I remember the mourning period that seemed to last for months on end for those on board the fated Challenger. It seemed to be the only news regardless of other notable worldwide events which, in my view, were ignored by the press. Even then as a teenager, I knew the inherent risks that came with being an astronaut, and given the choice, I would have grabbed the opportunity without thinking twice. Even now, as an adult with a family, I'd go. Interestingly, as of writing, there have been no children who have ever gone into space, the youngest being, Oliver Daemon, at age 18 who was onboard the Blue Origin spacecraft in 2021. Even then, this was a sub-orbital mission that went only to the 'edge of space'.

After 2011, astronauts went to space via Russia's still very active rocket program. It seemed a time of stagnation for the Americans until the enterprising risk-hungry Elon Musk proved to the world that the dreams, dreams which I had myself, could be realised. To send rockets to space *and* get astronauts to the International Space Station as a private company. Not only that, he managed to reduce the cost of shipping material to space dramatically and managed to re-use the rockets by having them land precisely on landing pads floating on the ocean. If you think about it, this is just astounding. My school hero, Neil Armstrong, was interviewed in his older years as to the question if space exploration could be

possible through private interests. The answer was a very disappointing ‘no’. How could this be? This was once my all-time hero and he became fully entrenched into big and cumbersome government institution thinking. It was heartbreaking to say the least. Also being a hero of Elon, Elon proved him wrong over and over again.

Space news doesn’t get the same level of excitement as it once did. In our modern world of social media, divisive politics and cringeworthy woke and snowflake issues, there seems to be no appetite for the wonders of space exploration anymore except for the hardened space enthusiasts. We have crisp high definition video footage of what goes on in the space station and of those performing space walks to make routine repairs on the exterior. Full video coverage of men and women working in the most hostile of environments is piped down to us 24/7 in high definition, but few watch or even care. Back in 2005, I was more surprised of people’s indifference or even ignorance that we managed to land a probe on the mysterious and primordial Titan, the biggest moon of Saturn.

Many criticise space exploration because of the money spent that could have been used elsewhere or on environmental grounds. As for all the achievements with the *SpaceX* programme, there are the usual ignoramuses and brain-dead people out there who denounce the achievements merely because Musk is behind it. Of those who criticise these programmes on such grounds like wasteful spending and environmental concern are blatantly naïve believing that the money will be used elsewhere for humanitarian reasons, not caring to think of the vast amount of money spent on warfare and filling up the coffers of corrupt politicians. It’s frankly, quite disgusting, but not surprising.

I have little doubt that Elon will be the first to get another man on the moon, the last being in 1972, more than fifty years ago. I wonder, at times, if it is even possible to do this anymore. Well, certainly not without a great level of difficulty, despite all the advances we made in modern computing and technology since the 70s. There have been significant moments in history in which mankind achieved such monumental greatness, like the building of the pyramids, that the likelihood of the skills required to do so may be forgotten in antiquity, the secrets of which, sometimes needs to be rediscovered. As for Mars? Who knows.

Lastly, I was captivated watching the live coverage of the astronauts in the *Dragon* docking with the ISS. And when I saw the edited coverage in the Netflix documentary, I thought of the greatness of human progress and achievement

when the astronauts were greeted arm in arm by the members of the Russian and American astronauts aboard the ISS. And meanwhile, on Earth, the clowns that represent the leaders of our nations are full on intent on showing their bravado, arrogance and sheer stupidity bringing us nearer to the brink of a nuclear war.