

SPACESHIPONE REVISITED

A new book uses video stills, striking photos, and a behind-the-scenes, “you were there” narrative to chronicle the 2004 race to win the \$10 million Ansari X Prize. REVIEW BY MARK MAYFIELD



There have been many defining moments in the history of aviation and space travel. Some of them have been covered extensively in the media while others have been shrouded in secrecy, often because of security issues, but every now and then, because no one thought to bring along a witness or two.

Even on some of NASA's most celebrated missions, there were arguments over whether a camera was a necessary piece of gear. Chris Kraft writes in detail in his 2001 book, *Flight*, about the arguments he had in making sure Apollo 11's lunar module carried a live television camera.

Today, in the world of commercial spaceflight, proprietary concerns have often led entrepreneurs to keep things as secret as possible, particularly during the manufacture and testing phases. Fortunately for all of us, Burt Rutan and Scaled Composites, while understandably operating in secret, were also documenting their progress in the lead-up to the historic race for the \$10 million Ansari X Prize in 2004. Writer Dan Linehan has now chronicled their efforts in a striking new book: *SpaceShipOne: An Illustrated History* (Zenith Press).

This book not only includes a compelling narrative of the first privately funded, manned vehicle to reach suborbital space, it also is richly illustrated with video stills and historic photographs. As a space writer and editor—and the former editor-in-chief of *House Beautiful* magazine—I can definitely appreciate a book that is as well-designed and illustrated as it is exciting to read. And it is important to note that *SpaceShipOne* isn't a shallow tabletop book: It is packed full of detail.

For instance, in Chapter 9, Linehan does an excellent job of capturing the tension as the clock began counting down on the race for the prize. “Time was running out,” writes Linehan. “Scaled Composites announced they would be making their attempt at the Ansari X Prize on September 29, 2004. To win, *SpaceShipOne* would have to fly not only on that day, but would have to fly once more by October 13th, leaving less than three months before the Ansari X Prize would expire. A major setback would take *SpaceShipOne* out of contention.”

The rest, as we all say, is history. Pilots Mike Melvill and Brian Binnie each flew *SpaceShipOne* to suborbital space, just five days apart, and captured the X Prize. Now, Rutan, in partnership with Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic, is moving forward with plans for *SpaceShipTwo*, which will ultimately carry paying passengers into space.

I asked Dan Linehan recently for his thoughts about Rutan and the entire Scaled Composites group. “If you put aside the excitement and allure of space and just think objectively, Scaled Composites, with Burt at the helm, has done absolutely amazing things with aircraft,” said Linehan. “Burt is now on this 40th vehicle going into flight testing. There have been so many innovations that include the use of composites and unique aerodynamic shapes. Just look at the accomplishments of *Voyager* and *Global Flyer*, both of which were able to fly around the world, nonstop and without refueling. He proved he could build a successful spaceship, which made it into space on just its 15th test flight and 4th powered-flight overall. Now with *SpaceShipTwo*, Scaled Composites will have the benefit of what they learned with SS1, a little more time, and significant financial resources provided by Virgin Galactic. Things can obviously go south when you are developing such complex systems, but all things considered, they are in an excellent position to succeed with SS2.”



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