



## **SpaceShipOne re-opened the astronomic way, after 36 years!**

by Adriano V. Autino

Dear Coplanetaries,

Today is a historical day, and nothing will be as before, on our old planet. June 21st 2004 will be remembered in the history as an important date, at least as much important as the one of the historical flight of the historical flights made by the Wright brothers, and Charles Lindbergh, around one century ago.

Both that SpaceShipOne succeeds in being awarded the 10 million of dollars of the X-Prize, or doesn't succeed, now the enterprise has been done. This morning, in the desert of Mojave, a vehicle entirely drawn and built by privates (the U.S. Scaled Composites, owned by the living aeronautical legend Burt Rutan, sponsored by Paul Allen, cofounder of Microsoft) reached the sub-orbital height of 100 kms, and returned to earth after a parabolic flight of about 1.5 hours. At the guide of the vehicle the 62 years old pilot Mike Melvill. To be awarded of the X-Prize, SpaceShipOne will owe to repeat twice the flight, at distance of fifteen days, with a simple ordinary maintenance between the two flights, bringing on board three not specifically trained civilians. Many astronaut friends (in the ideal, if not in the job), attended this day with trepidation and anxiety, and many comments cross the web, especially on the sites and lists dedicated to astronautics, space tourism and space supporting in general. It is also a little bit thanks to all these people, that encouraged the participants to the X-Prize to follow their work, if today we are here to comment happily this great success!

First, the technology. The thread that SpaceShipOne has renewed today is the one interrupted 36 years ago, when the promising development line of X-15 was abandoned. X-15 was a sub orbital plane that made 199 flights between 1959 and 1968, reaching 67 miles, almost 108 kms (<http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/x15/cover.html>).

X-15 was brought to 13 kms by a B52, then, released, it ignited its rocket motor and accelerated to mach 4 - 6, reaching the space. X-15 was sacrificed on the altar of the business of the spendable rockets builders, giving life to the shuttle, a not entirely reusable machine, built in only five very expensive samples, and never raised to an industrial production. That choice – with its tragic consequences of the 1986 Challengers tragedy, and of the Columbia one in 2003 – it mainly marked the abandonment of the astronautics and the beginning of the space politics targeted to earth, and not upward. It began the era of the telecommunication and earth observation satellites, while Astronautics was relegated to the role of mere scientific experiment, depriving it entirely of its prince role: the space exploration before, the industrialization of the geo-lunar space then, and the solar system colonization in a still longer perspective. The absolute dominion of the governments and the space agencies on the high frontier was so perpetuated for over thirty years, and the terrestrial orbit was filled with garbage, up to confine us in a sort of iron cage, as heavy as the ideological cage built up by the terrocentric philosophies, of the so-called limits of development.

But today all this is history. SpaceShipOne has shown different things, all of an importance that will be fully understood only in the months and in the years to come: (i) it is not true that to put a kg in orbit still has to cost 20.000 American dollars, when the new vehicles will be industrially set, it will cost very less; (ii) it is not true that to reach space we need the technologies of the big government agencies; (iii) it is not true that to go to space we need long trainings and need to be young (Mike Melvill is 62 years old!). This only to start.

Those people who fear the environmental cost of the space flight should think about the huge cost, for the terrestrial environment, of sticking on the oil power, in comparison to the solar energy (clean and boundless) harvested in space and stored on earth in form of hydrogen (just to make an example). Also let's wonder why the two ecologist lobbies (Green Peace and WWF, both fed by the oil lobbies), historically always supported only and entirely the so-called alternative sources (wind and terrestrial photovoltaic), that don't have any possibility to compete, neither quantitatively nor economically with the ultra-power of oil, while they always opposed the space technologies and kept on ashamedly silent about hydrogen.

Today also the above is history. Absurd and retrograde wars were ignited among opposite oil lobbyists. They try everything to denigrate and stonewall the

scientific culture and the technological research, favoring every sort of ideological trash, in a criminal attempt to prolong their dieing empire, putting at risk the same continuation of the human civilization. But then a small prize, founded in 1996 by two visionary entrepreneurs, shifted the initiative of some good willing men and women, and a small thing happens, as the Wright brothers' flight was, one of those small things, that however change the history!

All those people that take care to the continuation of our civilization, this night are toasting with champagne!

Long live to SpaceShipOne! Long live to Burt Rutan! Long live to Mike Melvill and all those people who contributed to this success!

Today, more than ever:

Aim High!

Adriano Autino