

I spent two most rewarding days on 21/22 June 2004 in Mojave, California. Owner of Scaled Composites and famed designer Burt Rutan had invited several "Old-timers" from Peenemünde to witness the launch into space of his SpaceShipOne.. We all were aware that this launch would be the beginning of a new era of space travel where ordinary people could go into space at a reasonable cost.

I was the only invitee who could accept Burt's invitation, since two friends, Raymond Crosnise and Laurent Sibille would travel with me. They had assured me that they would take good care of me during the drive and flight to Mojave. And they did perfectly assist me to get there and to enjoy this most unique venture.

After I had accepted the invitation, another major event took place the day before our departure. The U.S. Space and Rocket Center wants to restore the "SATURN V" and put it in a building. To aid in this effort a "SATURN V Restoration Project" was formed with Buzz Aldrin as Honorary chairman. He and former APOLLO Program Director George Müller were present for a Bar-B-Que organized for this purpose. It was a most pleasant affair with many dignitaries present.

The three of us left early the next morning in Laurent Sibille's car to Nashville, to catch a flight on Northwest Airlines via Phoenix to Burbank Airport. In Phoenix I had a chance to talk briefly on the phone to Mrs. Magnus von Braun who had already been informed by her daughter Lisa about the Saturday event as well as my plan to attend the launch of SpaceShipOne-. After arrival in Burbank we got the rental car that Ray had ordered, and we drove the 100 miles to Mojave, where Burt Rutan had reserved a room for us in the biggest Mojave Hotel, the Mariah. It is located directly at the Mojave airport. From our room we could see the entire airport where many airplanes are stored due to the normally excellent climate.

After supper we went to bed, since the launch was scheduled for 6:30 the next morning. We had been asked to be there one hour ahead of take-off time. We did not oversleep, and went to the launch area in the dark the next morning. A large tent had been set up where you could get coffee and food. T-shirts were for sale, and a huge crowd was already assembled. We found out that many people had slept in their cars since there were no vacancies in Mojave. Many others (including Buzz Aldrin) had come that night from Lancaster, and other places north of Los Angeles. We could stay in a hangar in the middle of the airport which had been reserved for VVIP's. It gave us a chance to talk to Buzz Aldrin and his wife, to Peter Diamandis, cofounder of the X-Prize. We saw William Shatner, and many other dignitaries.

It was very windy, and we were concerned that the launch might have to be postponed due to weather. It was otherwise a completely cloudless sky and turned out to be a perfect day. Locals told us that the high wind is a rather normal condition, and that the rising sun would decrease the wind velocity. This, in fact, did happen, and at 6:38, about the time of sunrise, the carrier ship WhiteKnight with test pilot Brian Binnie came out of its hangar with SpaceShipOne mounted under its belly. It rolled



just a few feet in front of the huge crowd of visitors on its taxiway to its start location on its actual runway. A few minutes later we heard the jet engines roar, and saw a rather short distance away the combined WhiteKnight/SpaceShipOne take off. Two chase planes had taken off earlier and were now ready to follow the launch vehicle.- It took a good hour to obtain an altitude of about 50,000 feet, where the release of SpaceShipOne was scheduled. Before the combination reached that altitude, the jetcraft formed the usual condensation trail, as all aircraft do at these altitudes.

During this hour of climbing time people roamed around and could meet and talk to the other visitors. I talked to the German astronaut Ulf Merbold who had trained for his Spacelab mission in Huntsville. I met astronaut Wu who had recently returned from his Space Station mission. All three of us discussed the X-Prize with billionaire Elon Musk, who is also working on an X-Prize project.

In the meantime a ground station was in radio communication with the climbing unit. That way we eventually heard that SpaceShipOne had been released. Just seconds later it was in the right position to start its hybrid rocket engine which formed immediately a vapor trail that pointed straight up. I did not see any disturbances, but found out later that pilot Mike Melville had some difficulty to control the ship properly. Apparently propellant sloshing created some of these disturbances. The firing duration appeared somewhat shorter than I had expected, and we found out later, that the engine had shut itself off earlier than planned. In spite of this shortcoming it reached its desired altitude of 62 miles, or 100 Kilometers. It turned therefore out to be a successful first launch of a privately built rocket system into outer space.

After a zero-g parabolic coasting of about 3 1/2 minutes, SpaceShipOne reentered the denser atmosphere, building up decelerations of several g's. The heating effect on the spaceship's skin was found to be unnoticeable. SpaceShipOne looked like brand-new upon final recovery. I was impressed by the fact that this trip into space ended by towing the mother ship and the spacecraft into the hangar, where a rather huge crowd could assemble right next to it and congratulate the pilot of the mother ship and the new civilian/commercial "astronaut" who was soon to be certified as such by an FAA representative.

Not only was Scaled Composites SpaceShipOne the first privately financed and privately built spacecraft to go into space, it was the first American craft of any kind to take a man into space after the mishap of Space Shuttle Columbia more than a year ago. Peter Diamondis said : "This is actually America's Return to Space. It should have happened 20 years ago".- It was for me an unforgettable event which is in the same class as the first successful launch of a rocket in Peenemünde, which took place now more than 60 years ago. I will never forget the excitement I felt during both events.

Konrad K. Dannenberg, Peenemünde "Oldtimer"