

# Mission: SPACE is a ‘Blast’ for Epcot Guests

E-ticket ride thrills Epcot guests

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — All systems are “go,” “launch conditions” are favorable, and Epcot guests are responding with “out of this world” exclamations after experiencing Mission: SPACE presented by HP. The thrill ride has exceeded its sky-high expectations, proving to be one of the most popular attractions at the 40-square-mile Walt Disney World Resort. Testimonials from guests include words like “exhilarating,” “cutting-edge” and from younger guests, one simple word — “awesome.”

Most first-timers sit in awe of the thundering roar of rockets and the exhilarating liftoff that launches them into an out-of-this-world adventure.

Pioneering astronauts like Buzz Aldrin and Rhea Seddon have also taken their turn on the ride, which they compare to actual space travel.

“It was a really good combination of reality and looking ahead to what things might be like,” said Seddon, a former NASA astronaut who flew three shuttle missions. “I knew intellectually it was a centrifuge and that’s how they were generating the feeling, but it doesn’t feel like a centrifuge.”

## **Disney’s Flight to Mars Spent Years in the Making**

Decades “in the dreaming” and some five years and 350,000 work hours “in the making,” the attraction uses a first-of-its-kind custom-designed ride system based on actual NASA astronaut training techniques. The one-of-a-kind, deep-space simulated mission to Mars is so believable that some Epcot guests ponder whether they have left the building during the adventure.

The mission begins with an exhilarating liftoff that provides the sensation of blasting off into simulated flight, followed by a brief sensation of weightlessness in the darkness of space, an exhilarating “slingshot” maneuver around the moon, an asteroid-dodging dash toward Mars and a wild final landing sequence on the red planet.

The attraction is, in fact, the most technologically advanced ever created by Disney. It also marks a continuation of the collaboration with HP that dates back more than 60 years. HP’s involvement with the Walt Disney Company began with the sale of a specially modified version of Bill Hewlett’s first invention to help fine tune theater acoustics for the motion picture “Fantasia.”

## **ISTC: Disney’s Home to Mars Exploration**

The setting for Mission: SPACE is several decades in the future at the International Space Training Center. Guests are selected as “crew members” for the ultimate space mission before heading to the dispatch area and the Ready Room to receive a history of astronaut training and an individual role to perform — commander, pilot, navigator or engineer.

Guests load into the spacecraft, receive final briefings from CapCom and buckle in for liftoff. When the countdown reaches zero, the earth rumbles, white clouds of exhaust start to stir, and the ascent begins.

CapCom communicates with guests throughout the mission, guiding them through vital tasks they must perform to safely land their spacecraft on Mars. Guests encounter unexpected twists, turns and other surprises that challenge them to think quickly, react fast and successfully complete the mission.

“It’s an amazing experience — it’s out of this world,” said Bob Zalk, Walt Disney Imagineer and co-producer of Mission: SPACE. “Guests will certainly say this ride is unlike any other experience they have had before.”

## **Real-World Science Meets Disney Magic**

The realism of the experience adds to its uniqueness, said Susan Bryan, Walt Disney Imagineer and co-producer of Mission: SPACE.

“Mission: SPACE is very much based in reality; it’s a mix of real science and thrill,” Bryan said. “The sensations are what the astronauts actually experience, but it’s accessible to our guests.”

The Mission: SPACE team spent years consulting with present and former NASA advisors, astronauts and scientists from California Institute of Technology’s Jet Propulsion Laboratory. They experienced astronaut and pilot training simulators at facilities throughout the United States.

The result is a theme park attraction that immerses guests in actual elements of astronaut training: understanding and learning how to operate the spacecraft; familiarization with specific roles on an astronaut team; and experiencing a shuttle launch simulation. Invariably, post-mission chatter includes numerous “wows” regarding the launch and visual representations of space that guests experience.

Mission: SPACE is built on existing principles of centrifuge technology to generate a true-to-life sensation of launching vertically. The integration of pitch and roll movement adds incredible realism to the experience.

As for the visuals: The challenge of creating a believable “view out the window” resulted in the development of a unique virtual imaging system built to the optical quality standards used in industrial and military applications — including a state-of-the-art flat screen featuring components not yet available in the marketplace.

From their capsule windows, guests view planets Earth and Mars — each computer-generated from data provided by satellites and spacecraft orbiting the planets, including *Mars Odyssey* and *Global Surveyor*. And all guests — no matter how tall or short — see a spectacular space-scape, as the system is designed to ensure stellar viewing for guests of all heights.

The complexity of the ride system requires an enormous amount of equipment, computers and technology to be carried on board. Through a wide spectrum of engineering and manufacturing techniques, Imagineers combined ultra lightweight carbon fiber materials with airplane wing construction techniques and integrated components into the capsule itself. For example, the thunderous sounds of the launch come from a stereo woofer built into the back of the capsules.

### **Epcot Guests Have Choice of Two Mission: SPACE Adventures**

Epcot guests have two options when it comes to riding Mission: SPACE — the original thrill attraction and a version for those who prefer a milder experience.

The “mild” version, which is created by turning off the spinning centrifuge, may be more suited for some guests, such as those prone to motion sickness or other conditions. Both versions offer an exciting astronaut training experience through a dramatic story that invites guests to explore a new world.

Signs posted in the queue area of Mission: SPACE outline the difference between the two adventures and provide health advisories appropriate for each experience.

Mission: SPACE opened in August 2003. Since that time, millions of rides have been given on the attraction, which simulates the launch, approach and landing of a futuristic spacecraft on Mars. The attraction is made up of four separate ride systems, each with its own centrifuge and programmable simulators.

### **Advanced Training Lab Offers More Family Fun**

For guests craving more space-themed fun, training continues in the Mission: SPACE post show, powered by HP. In this Advanced Training Lab, guests of all ages can explore interactive space experiences, including:

- Space Race — Two teams compete in a race to send their rocket from Mars back to Earth. Nearly 60 people can play the high-energy game at once, and thousands more can participate through the Internet at [www.disneyspacepace.com](http://www.disneyspacepace.com).
- Space Base — For junior astronauts, Space Base provides a fun, interactive crawl space for exploration.
- Expedition: Mars — A joystick and a jetpack button help guests explore the surface of Mars.
- Postcards from Space — Guests can e-mail a video of themselves with a space-themed background and

create a souvenir of their Mission: SPACE experience.

The Advanced Training Lab is open to all guests, including those electing not to experience Mission: SPACE and those who fall below the minimum height requirement of 44 inches.

### **About Epcot**

Epcot is the Walt Disney World discovery park where guests are immersed in a celebration of technological accomplishments and international cultural achievements. The 300-acre theme park features two unique worlds — Future World and World Showcase — with attractions, shows, interactive presentations, dining, shopping and architectural wonders. Epcot is part of Walt Disney World Resort in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

For more information, call 407/824-4321 or visit [disneyworld.com](http://disneyworld.com).

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