



Riding Rockets: The Outrageous Tales of a Space Shuttle Astronaut

By Mike Mullane

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On February 1, 1978, the first group of space shuttle astronauts, twenty-nine men and six women, were introduced to the world. Among them would be history makers, including the first American woman and the first African American in space. This assembly of astronauts would carry NASA through the most tumultuous years of the space shuttle program. Four would die on *Challenger*.

USAF Colonel Mike Mullane was a member of this astronaut class, and *Riding Rockets* is his story -- told with a candor never before seen in an astronaut's memoir. Mullane strips the heroic veneer from the astronaut corps and paints them as they are -- human. His tales of arrested development among military flyboys working with feminist pioneers and post-doc scientists are sometimes bawdy, often hilarious, and always entertaining.

Mullane vividly portrays every aspect of the astronaut experience -- from telling a female technician which urine-collection condom size is a fit; to walking along a Florida beach in a last, tearful goodbye with a spouse; to a wild, intoxicating, terrifying ride into space; to hearing "Taps" played over a friend's grave. Mullane is brutally honest in his criticism of a NASA leadership whose bungling would precipitate the *Challenger* disaster.

Riding Rockets is a story of life in all its fateful uncertainty, of the impact of a family tragedy on a nine-year-old boy, of the revelatory effect of a machine called Sputnik, and of the life-steering powers of lust, love, and marriage. It is a story of the human experience that will resonate long after the call of "Wheel stop."

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

With a testosterone-fueled swagger and a keen eye for particulars, Mullane takes readers into the high-intensity, high-stress world of the shuttle astronaut in this rough-hewn yet charming yarn of low-rent antics, bureaucratic insanity and transcendent beauty. Mullane opens this tale face down on a doctor's table awaiting a colorectal exam that will determine his fitness for astronaut training. "I was determined when the NASA proctologist looked up my ass, he would see pipes so dazzling he would ask the nurse to get his sunglasses," he writes, setting the tone for the crude and often hilarious story that follows. Chosen as a trainee in 1978, Mullane, a Vietnam vet, quickly finds himself at odds with the buttoned-up post-Apollo NASA world of scientists, technocrats and civilian astronauts he describes as "tree-huggers, dolphin friendly fish eaters, vegetarians, and subscribers to the *New York Times*." He holds female astronauts in special disregard, though he later grudgingly acknowledges the achievement and heroism of both the civilians and women. The book hits its stride with Mullane's space adventures: a difficult takeoff, the shift into zero gravity, his first view of the Earth from space: "To say the view was overwhelmingly beautiful would be an insult to God." (*Feb. 14*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From [Booklist](#)

One of the first astronaut memoirs from the space-shuttle era tells a thoroughly absorbing story. Mullane, an air force brat, flew 134 missions in Vietnam. In the late 1970s, he volunteered for the shuttle program, was accepted, and flew three orbital missions before retiring. His accounts of those missions are gripping. They leave one in no doubt that the shuttle was a somewhat imperfect instrument that somehow still performed marvels. Mullane also pays tribute to his fellow astronauts, a small community that suffered with every death or other loss to the "family" it constituted, and to his wife, who endured 40 years of the stresses of being a pilot's partner. And while this isn't an expose, Mullane makes it clear that NASA's corporate culture wasn't optimal for getting the results it sought. Despite the shuttle's apparent failures, the era when it was America's mainstay in space laid groundwork for the future, and further shuttle chronicles are needed and deserved. A strong addition to science and space collections of any size. *Roland Green*
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Review

"Space-age America in all its glory and folly as seen through the eyes of a remarkable writer who has brilliantly captured the triumphant and tragic years of the space shuttle era. *Riding Rockets* soars."

-- Homer Hickam, author of *Rocket Boys*

"Compelling."

-- *Entertainment Weekly*

"This is not your father's astronaut memoir.... Mullane's story rings true every adventurous step of the way."

-- *Rocky Mountain News*

"Funny, harrowing, tragic...*Riding Rockets* is a thrill, from start to finish."

-- *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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Tammy Booker:

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