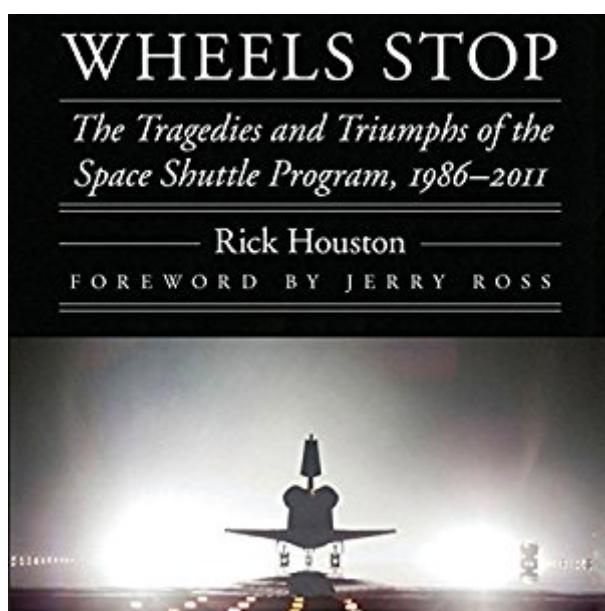


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Wheels Stop: The Tragedies And Triumphs Of The Space Shuttle Program, 1986–2011: Outward Odyssey: A People's History Of Space



Synopsis

Humanity's first reusable spacecraft and the most complex machine ever built, NASA's space shuttle debuted with great promise and as a dependable source of wonder and national pride. But with the Challenger catastrophe in 1986, the whole space shuttle program came into question, as did NASA itself, so long an institution that was seemingly above reproach. *Wheels Stop* tells the stirring story of how, after the Challenger disaster, the space shuttle not only recovered but went on to perform its greatest missions. From the Return to Flight mission of STS-26 in 1988 to the last shuttle mission ever on STS-135 in 2011, *Wheels Stop* takes listeners behind the scenes as the shuttle's crews begin to mend Cold War tensions with the former Soviet Union, conduct vital research, deploy satellites, repair the Hubble Space Telescope, and assist in constructing the International Space Station. It also tells the heart-wrenching story of the Columbia tragedy and the loss of the magnificent STS-107 crew. As complex as the shuttle was, the people it carried into orbit were often more so - and this is their story, too. Close encounters with astronauts, flight controllers, and shuttle workers capture the human side of the space shuttle's amazing journey - and invite listeners along for the ride. The book is published by University of Nebraska Press.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is the fourth book I've read in the excellent "People's History of Spaceflight Series," the prior

books covering Projects Gemini, through Apollo, and finally, Skylab. "Wheels Stop," familiar to space-watchers as the final call heard from Mission Control at the conclusion of a Shuttle mission, is a solid addition to the series, covering the highlights of the Space Shuttle program from 1986 to 2011. I have to say up front that, and as you might suspect, due to the nature of the Shuttle program, much of the narrative is a bit less thrilling than, say, the books covering the exploits of the Apollo program. Having said that, I have to praise author Rick Houston for doing a fine job. It's no easy feat to summarize twenty five years' worth of shuttle flights in a single volume. (What should be highlighted? What should be left out? Who should be specifically mentioned?) I think Houston handled it about as well as anyone could, deftly weaving together many personal stories gathered in dozens of interviews with the astronauts and engineers behind the program. A trap for this book could have been to approach 25 years' worth of shuttle missions sequentially, which might have been a recipe for a plodding narrative. Houston avoids this by delivering a non-sequential format focused instead on major themes: missions to Mir, Hubble Telescope servicing missions, and assembly of the International Space Station. And, of course, the devastating loss of Space Shuttle Columbia in 2003. I'd say the most compelling sections of the book are those that deal with the loss of Columbia and the subsequent "Return to Flight," as it was known to program insiders. There are passages in these sections which are, to this day, 11 years after the accident, simply searing in their intensity. It's hard to read them without feeling a knot welling up in your gut. Those who stood by to pick up the pieces, determine the causes and correct the system were all deeply affected by the experience. Most were changed forever. Houston takes the reader as close to being a NASA insider as an observer can get. The list of personalities and interviews that are assembled for this book are impressive and, as with past volumes in this series, really form its backbone. Many astronaut interviews are presented verbatim in extended quotes that really allow the reader to get into their thoughts. Some of the names are familiar, but many are not. The program lasted for such a long period of time and flew so many different astronauts that, unlike programs such as Apollo, the stories are less easily associated with famous characters. However, their personal stories are key to understanding the feeling of "mission" that each of the Shuttle astronauts seemed to feel so keenly. Despite the achievements of the Shuttle program, the spectacular engineering of mankind's most complex flying machine, and the impressive dedication of the teams that put it all together, there is a lingering question that hangs over the entire book: what was

the value of it all? Was the Shuttle a 30-year detour from more productive efforts in space exploration? Aside from Hubble servicing missions and ISS assembly, was repeatedly sending humans into low earth orbit necessary or the best expenditure of our national resources? That's a question that's difficult to answer and how you feel about it most likely depends on who you are. Houston recognizes this 800-pound gorilla in the room and acknowledges it but does not try to present a pat answer. And that's a credit to him. Many more years will likely have to pass before we can evaluate this program objectively. In the mean time, you can best formulate your personal answer by reading *"Wheels Stop."*

The latest addition to the Outward Odyssey family of books is entitled "Wheels Stop." Recruited by the prolific space author and Outward Odyssey series editor Colin Burgess, Rick Houston's contribution focuses on the space shuttle program from the period just after the Challenger disaster through to its sad but timely completion with STS-135 in 2011. Largely through the interview process, author Houston was able spend some quality time with many of the key participants in the program....not just the astronauts, but many of the behind-the-scenes and unsung heroes who helped to make it all happen. As a space enthusiast/collector, my interest is mainly in books. Patches, pins, photos, covers. etc. are interesting, but I like the education and entertainment value that a good book can provide. "Wheels Stop" offers that in spades! While reading it, I learned something new with every turn of a page. The parts of the book I enjoyed the most were the sections on the deployment, repair and maintenance of the Hubble Telescope and the construction of the International Space Station. The very dangerous and exacting spacewalks required to accomplish those tasks are described in detail by the astronauts who performed them. During down-time (of which there was very little on the shuttle) the astronauts got to be space tourists. Almost universally, they describe how incredibly beautiful and fragile our planet appears from orbit, and when they look the other way, the sensations they felt looking out into the vastness of space. After reading "Wheels Stop;" I have a much greater appreciation for what a truly marvelous machine the space shuttle orbiter was, for all that was accomplished in the 30 years that she flew, for all the talented and dedicated people support people on the ground, and for those who took her to space. If you are at all interested in spaceflight, "Wheels Stop" needs to be on your bookshelf.

The inner workings and complexities of how to get there from here. Great read of behind the scene and the great folks who contributed to the space shuttle from management to launch and the final

wheels stop.

There are typographical errors in the kindle format edition, however, its contents does a great job at taking us to the awesome world of the space shuttle.

Was not conscious of how close to death each flight's performance was.

Broken words throughout the book made for difficult reading. Not worth the high price for the book.

Interesting but little more than you could gain from reading all the flight transcripts, which appears to have been done here. However, the interviews add some greater interest to book.

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