

4-1-1958

Projecting with Space Journal

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Recommended Citation

Isbell, B Spencer (1958) "Projecting with Space Journal," *Space Journal*: Vol. 1: No. 2, Article 3.
Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/space-journal/vol1/iss2/3>

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By B. Spencer Isbell
editor

SPUTNIKS and now our own Explorer have changed a lot of things by opening the eyes of the public to the fact that space travel has become a reality. As you might guess, the impact of satellite launchings upon this fledgling publication has been very favorable. One news commentator stated, "It (Sputnik) has shot tremendous thrust into what started out as America's first, faltering space magazine called SPACE Journal—dedicated to publicizing factual discussions of interplanetary travel."

The second edition of SPACE Journal was prepared prior to the birth of Explorer; and, therefore, it was impossible to exploit the vast amount of new information for inclusion in this edition. There is little doubt that Explorer will have its effect on expanding the horizon for SPACE Journal.

Volume 1, No. 1 brought many "letters to the editor"; a few are published in this edition's Reaction Department. Among other things, some letters requested predictions of what the future will bring in the realm of space travel, explanations of relativistic aging, and reports on what progress has been made toward developing an "electro-gravitic" propulsion system for space ships.

Forthcoming issues will include articles which will attempt to satisfy these requests. The next issue will include an article on what we have already learned from Explorer.

With due respect for our more imaginative readers, we were more impressed—and should add, quite concerned—by the volume of mail received from our younger fans. Almost invariably they wanted detailed information that would help them to build their own rockets (usually proposed as a basement project). These young people appear resourceful, imaginative, and capable of some startling accomplishments. They will be our next generation of scientists and engineers.

While their quest for knowledge and experience is certainly laudable, the danger to life and property inherent in amateur rocket building and firing often creates a highly undesirable situation. This danger is recognized by the professional engineer and scientist, as well as the organizations actively engaged in rocket and missile work. Dr. Edward H. Seymour, Director of Research at Reaction Motors, Inc., has prepared a special letter to young scientists. We feel that it may help an ever-increasing number of youngsters who are interested in undertaking experiments of this type.

TO THE AMATEUR ROCKET BUILDER

We were happy to receive your recent letter, and to learn of your plans for an experimental rocket. The rocket engine is an intriguing device, and working on its development can be an interesting and satisfying project. As rocket engine manufacturers, we are always encouraged to see young people become enthusiastic about this area of activity, for it is young men like you who will be the engineers and scientists of tomorrow and helping to maintain progress in this vital field.

Although the approach to an experimental unit such as you outlined appears reasonable, we have found that it is not possible for us to determine the feasibility, or even more important, the safety of such a unit without more information. All experimental work must be reviewed carefully to determine how each piece is to be built, and what type of operating procedure is to be used. We use the same approach in our work. Each new design is carefully checked, and tests are run with carefully planned and supervised procedures.

Almost all rocket engine testing, especially new designs, is done behind explosion-proof, reinforced concrete barricades, where all operating personnel are safely separated from the unit under test. To the amateur, without extensive training and costly equipment, this sort of research is extremely hazardous. For your own safety, as well as the safety of others, we cannot emphasize too strongly the dangers inherent in this type of work. Oxygen and propane, for instance, contain more energy per pound than does TNT. If it happens to be released explosively instead of in normal burning, considerable damage and injury can occur.

I am sorry we cannot give you a more direct answer to your question, but experience has shown us that it is not possible to do this without being right on the spot every day, and the importance of avoiding injury and damage is so great that we feel that this must be our policy.

I would urge that you discuss your planned work with your high school science teacher, and investigate the possibility of forming an amateur rocket club. It is far better to share with others the joys and hardships, the successes and failures, (and incidentally, the expenses) of work on such an exciting project. There are a number of such groups throughout the country, many of them affiliated with the American Astronautical Federation, a national organization dedicated to the collection and dissemination of information and the promotion of space flight, or with the American Rocket Society. Whether you form such a group or not, any future work you do should be under the guidance of a responsible adult such as your science teacher.

Should you decide to follow the interest you have already shown in this field, and we certainly hope you do, you will be coming into an exciting profession at the most dramatic time. Throughout the course of history, man has always been intrigued by exploration of this blanket of air that surrounds us. Many of his attempts to pierce it, including some of those currently in progress, have been plagued with failure. Nonetheless, he has persisted with a will to succeed that has put within our grasp the means to accomplish his most fascinating dream—flight into outer space.

Dr. Edward H. Seymour
Director of Research
Reaction Motors, Inc.