



Riding Rockets: The Outrageous Tales of a Space Shuttle Astronaut

By Mike Mullane

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In 1978, the first group of space shuttle astronauts was introduced to the world -- twenty-nine men and six women who would carry NASA through the most tumultuous years of the space shuttle program. Among them was USAF Colonel Mike Mullane, who, in his memoir *Riding Rockets*, strips the heroic veneer from the astronaut corps and paints them as they are -- human.

Mullane's tales of arrested development among military flyboys working with feminist pioneers and post-doc scientists are sometimes bawdy, often comical, and always entertaining. He vividly portrays every aspect of the astronaut experience, from telling a female technician which urine-collection condom size is a fit to hearing "Taps" played over a friend's grave. He is also brutally honest in his criticism of a NASA leadership whose bungling would precipitate the Challenger disaster -- killing four members of his group. A hilarious, heartfelt story of life in all its fateful uncertainty, *Riding Rockets* will resonate long after the call of "Wheel stop."

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Riding Rockets: The Outrageous Tales of a Space Shuttle Astronaut By Mike Mullane Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #63881 in Books
- Brand: imusti
- Published on: 2007-02-06
- Released on: 2007-02-06
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.44" h x 1.10" w x 5.50" l, .79 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 400 pages



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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)

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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 exposé, 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*

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