

APOGEE

PEAK OF FLIGHT

NEWSLETTER

What Style of Rockets Do You Like?

By Tim Van Milligan

Being in the model rocket business means that I have to be on a constant look-out for trends. If I'm smart, I'll try to use these trends to my advantage by making products that will appeal to the greatest number of modelers. This is no secret; all manufacturers do this too.

The trend that always fascinated me was that there are certain styles of models that rocketeers prefer.

Have you ever sat back and tried to pigeon-hole a model into a classification based on what emotion it evokes? I have. I do it all the time, because I'm looking for a trend.

So dig out your old catalogs, and follow along with me as I classify models by their style. I'm not classifying them by: sport model, competition model, high power model. I'm thinking of broad styles of sport models based on their exterior paint scheme. Because you can take the same rocket and paint it in different ways -- and each way you paint it will put it into a different "style" category.

For example, for those of you that have my book: *"Model Rocket Design and Construction,"* (2nd edition), take a look at page 14. On that page, you'll see the same rocket with different color schemes. Each decor puts the rocket into a different "style" classification.

What are the different styles? Let's start a list...

Classification #1: NASA Research Vehicle. These are rockets that look like they might have been used by NASA for high altitude studies. For example, a Nike Cajun rocket would fall into this category. It doesn't have to be a real "scale model," just something that looks like it could be a real NASA rocket. To me, rockets that use silver/white or gold/white paint colors seem to fall into this category. They may also included a stencil looking font for any wording on them.

Classification #2: Military kill vehicle. For example, this might be something painted olive drab green, or light gray (depending on what branch of the military it is supposed to mimic). But it has a menacing look to it.

Classification #3: Industrial Research vehicle. Did you ever notice that when a contractor paints up a rocket, it is slick and smooth with bright colors. I think of the Red, White, and Blue version of the Tomahawk Cruise Missile. It looks nothing like the kill vehicle that it actually is. And instead of a "stencil" looking font for any wording, they use something more polished: like Helvetica.

Classification #4: Military Space Ranger theme: This is models that are painted up to look like they were made for new branch of the military: the Space Rangers. For example, Buck Rodgers style rockets.

I could go on and on about how "I" classify rockets by their theme, style, and appearance. But actually, I'm more interested the classifications "you" have for rockets. You see, my alternate motive in this article is to get your thoughts. I'm looking for trends. I want to know what is the style of rocket that most modelers prefer building and painting.

But I'll share the comments I get back from you with other modelers, because it should be fun to read.

So your homework assignment for this week is to give me the classifications that you come up with for the different styles of rockets. Like I said before, dig out your old catalogs, and let your imagination take over. What feelings or emotions do each rocket in the catalog generate in your brain? Make a list.

The second part of your assignment is to rank them in which styles you build most often. For example, if you like to build rockets that look like Military Kill Vehicles, put this as your top choice.

I look forward to reading your comments! If you send me your lists, I'll do my best to get them organized for the next issue of this e-zine. It should be some interesting reading.

Results

From: Donald Qualls

My classifications are close to yours:

1. Military missiles (subtypes: ballistic missiles and "mov-



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ing target" types)

2. Manned space launchers
3. Retro Sci-fi designs -- Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, etc. Fantasy scale -- Star Wars, Silent Running, Battlestar Galactica, etc.
4. Realistic SF designs -- Discovery from 2001 is the finest example
5. Sounding rockets
6. NASA and other (Arianespace, Sea Launch, etc.) unmanned space launchers
7. Plain sport models (hot rod type paint jobs, or simple color schemes)
8. Test beds and research rockets in their own right

From: Dan Kirk

Here are the types of rockets I like from least to most likely purchase:

13. RTF Ready to Fail. Heavy, poorly detailed, and downright ugly.
 12. 3FNC Three fins and a nose cone.
 11. Neat, but too expensive to risk flying. This includes R/C Gliders, reload casings, altimeters, video cameras, and most High Power rockets.
 10. Neat, but too much work to risk flying. This would include most competitive scale models.
 9. Military Missiles.
 8. Unmanned Spacecraft, Boosters, and Sounding Rockets.
 7. Rockets that look like airplanes.
 6. Manned Spacecraft
 5. Retro Rockets. Goddard, VFR, ARS, etc.
 4. Sport/Demo. Good looking, reliable, and reasonable performance.
 3. "Concept" Vehicles. The main thing that separates these from Science Fiction is a specific, near-future mission
 2. Rockets that do something. This would include multistagers, boost gliders, etc.
 1. Science Fiction.
- The distinction between "Concept" and Science Fiction is kind of fuzzy.

From: Michael Dennis

Hmmm, well you asked about how I classify rockets and

then to tell you about the emotion that each invokes. I think you hit several of the most common designs, but I often look for one of these types when I go looking for the next rocket:

1. True Scale models - hence my order with you for the two Saturn birds (V & 1b) that you are working hard to deliver this spring. I can't wait!!!
 2. "Retro" rockets - these are ones like the PML Lil Lunar Express
- As always, I really enjoy your newsletter and I hope this is helpful to you in some way.

Keep it up!

From: Tir' - the fellow from Canada

Hrrm...

- 1) Plain Old Model Rockets. They don't look like anything but themselves. 3FNC type stuff.
- 2) Military. Models of real or fanciful missiles, what you've called 'Military Kill' style rockets. Lots of fins, lots of stenciled labels. :)
- 3) Real Space Vehicles. Accurate or stand-off scale models of real honest-to-God space rockets, everything from the Black Brant to the Saturn V. Includes proposed but never built rockets too.
- 4) Sci-Fi. Entirely imaginary space ships. Can be 'scale' models of space ships from films or TV, or wholly original designs.
- 5) Oddrocs. Anything clearly not originally intended to fly. :) Odd shapes, odd conversions. The antithesis of 3FNC.

From: Jonathan Somers

Regarding classifications: My most sought-after rockets are a category I loosely think of as "complex". This has nothing to do with the NAR designation. In my mind it involves unusual or interesting behavior - most frequently after apogee/during recovery, but potentially during boost as well. It's the exact antithesis of three fins and a nose cone.

Another classification which is great for a low-cost model is the "gotta do it at least once" category - things you want to fly, just so that you can say you did it. Example - the MachBuster.

My last category is the "wadding free" category. I scratch build a lot of models with rear deployment - either streamers wrapped around a pop pod, or parachutes encased in a protec-

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tive cartridge that attaches to the motor mount. Gliders and helicopters also solve this problem.

You mentioned the Buck Rogers category and that's another one of my personal favorites.

From: Jonathan Elder

I finally did my homework but I can't believe you gave me homework on spring break!! Actually, rocket homework is fun so I don't mind.

Here's your classifications in the order that I like best.

Classification #4: Military Space Ranger theme:

Classification #1: NASA Research Vehicle.

Classification #3: Industrial Research vehicle.

Classification #2: Military kill vehicle.

I like sport models and then scale missiles the best.

My Own Catagory Classification

I've been studying this topic for quite a few years. I'm constantly trying to find an edge that will help Apogee sell more rockets. I personally put rockets into specific catagories that are linked to the paint job, and how they are marketed by the manufacturers.

You can go through any old rocketry catalog and put the models into theses thematic catagories:

1. Pure Fun or silliness (example: the Gooney-Birds)

2. Educational - This rocket will make you a 'real' scientist. Estes Viking.

3. Bigger is Better -- Higher is Best! The ego factor is envolved, so that the 'winner' gets the girlfriend. Cheesecake photos! I think the female character in Star Trek Voyager called "7 of 9" is a great example of the type of emotions that are stimulated by this theme.

4. Dark & Black -- Evil and sinister; stealth. This theme

works well on teenage modelers -- which is why they wear dark cloths. The latest version of the Big Bertha model uses this theme because it helps sell more models to this age group.

5. Cool Dude Theme! Characterized by skate-board graphics. Estes seems to be using this theme on a lot of their new E2X kits. Prismatic graphics. I don't particularly like this theme, because the emotions are fleeting and not powerful. But the bright colors catch the youngster's eye. They are trying to stimulate the feeling of an "easy-to-build" kit.

6. Patriotic -- The hero syndrome. Red, White & Blue rockets.

7. Fluff & Feathers -- Barbie Dolls. This one really sucks for rocketry. Characterized by the colors Purple and Pink, like the Estes Zinger. This is an attempt to go after the girl market.

8. Middle Earth Fantasy -- dark, mystic and magical. The Estes wizard tries to use this theme.

9. Military Theme -- models that aren't neccessarily related to a space theme, but draw out certain war-like emotions. The anti-ship missiles or a Tomahawk Cruise missile would fall into this catagory. This is somewhat related to the Patriotic type models. Estes Aim-9 Sidewinder rocket.

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