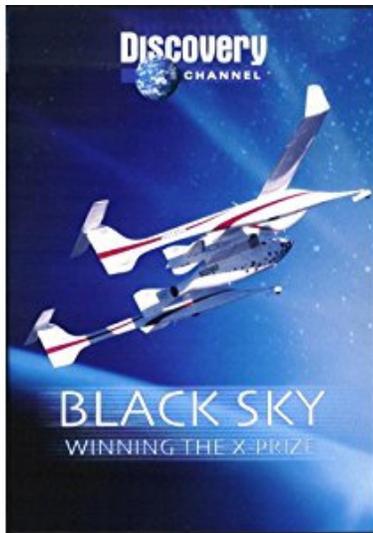


Black Sky - Winning the X-Prize

(DVD, Paul G. Allen and Burt Rutan, 43 min)



Fifty seconds into the first of the two X-Prize winning flights of SpaceShipOne Mike Melvill, the pilot reported breathless “high and dangerous roll rates”.

This is illustrated by video from the cockpit and the tense faces of the control team on the ground responding with appropriate instructions.

This impressive documentary is capturing the efforts of Paul G. Allen (Microsoft co-founder) and Burt Rutan (Scaled Composites), Mike Melvill (pilot of the first test flight reaching suborbital height and pilot of flight one of the two the X-Prize winning flights) and Brian Binnie (pilot of the required second flight for completing the X-Prize) and the small team of engineers and flight controllers at Scaled Composites competing for and winning the X-prize.

The **Ansary Space X-Prize** was initiated by Peter Diamandis in order to foster commercial spaceflight activities by announcing the sum of \$10 Mio for a private company being able to build a space plane carrying three passengers to suborbital height (100 km) and repeat that flight within 2 weeks with the same vehicle.

The DVD starts with Melvill’s first test flight on 21st June 2004 reaching barely the required height of 100km (100.124km) earning him his “astronaut wings”. The lessons learned were a re-alignment of the ascent trajectory and further rocket motor enhancements.

The hectic activities before the first of the two actual X-Prize flights on 29th September 2004 are impressively documented including private thoughts of Rutan, Melvill and his family. The situation was even more stressful for all players because the original pilot being trained for this first flight, Pete Siebold got sick and was not able to make the flight, so Mike Melville who never considered himself as taking part of the actual X-Prize flights was asked and had to adapt to the new situation quickly. The moments of decision and his actual briefing before his flight show the tense situation.

Nevertheless the flight was successful – even with a dangerous roll anomaly during the flight. Showing his professionalism Mike took his hands off the controls and let the automatic RCS system fight down the roll into reasonable rates (all documented by cockpit video and ground control voice exchange) he took out his camera snapping away pictures (“The roll rate is not too bad for taking pictures”).

He achieved a peak height of 102.900 km well above the required margin.

The second and prize winning flight was carried out very smoothly by Brian Binnie to a height of 112.000km, although this flight had its stressful moments also, again documented by cockpit video and authentic air to ground communications. Brian said after reentering and being relieved of an approx. 5g pressure: “I feel a little loopy-goopy”).

Burt Rutan said after the successful second flight and having accepted the congratulations by the president George W. Bush: “This is not an end but a very good beginning...” with a very happy Sir Richard Branson (Virgin Galactic) in the background.

The DVD is very recommendable, it shows technical background, personal emotions and the dedication of engineers working in the new field of “commercial spaceflight” – well aware of being the pioneers of a new space age.