

# THE MOON ROCKET

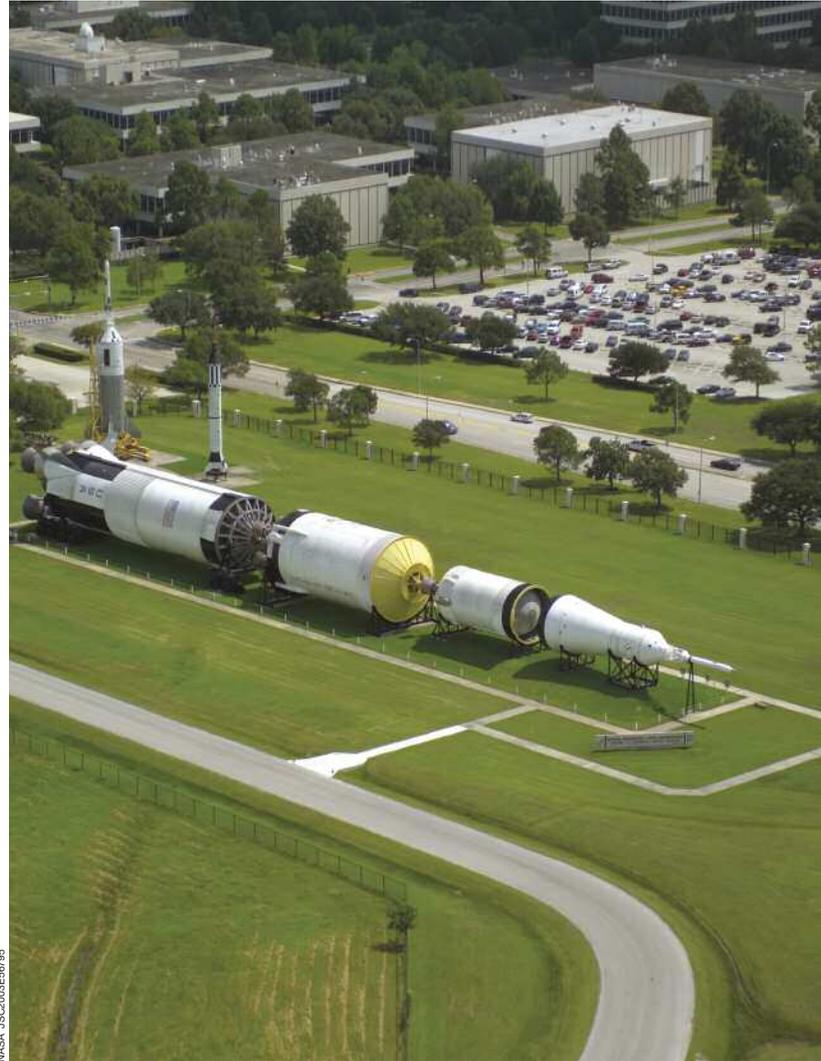
By Jennifer Ross-Nazzal

**I still remember** the first time I saw a Saturn rocket. It was the summer of 2000, and I had just accepted an internship with the Johnson Space Center (JSC) Oral History Project. My husband and I had been on the road for four days, coming from eastern Washington. In our 1993 purple Cavalier, we drove down NASA Road 1 toward the Center. As we inched closer to Saturn Lane, I saw the rockets on display within the Center's gates. I was in awe of the Saturn's immense size and had a hard time taking photos of the entire thirty-story vehicle.



NASA\_JSC2003E48813

*JSC's Rocket Park features a single F-1 rocket engine (on the left), the five F-1 engines, and the first stage of an actual Apollo Saturn V launch vehicle.*



NASA\_JSC2003E56795

*The Saturn V, near the main entrance of JSC, impressed thousands of approaching visitors for almost twenty years (aerial view, 2003).*



NASA\_JSC2003E46904

*Due to the area's environmental elements, the 363-foot Moon Rocket experienced deterioration.*



NASA\_JSC2004E33613

*The National Air and Space Museum began an extensive repair and restoration project, March 2004.*



NASA\_JSC2004E37838

*The structure framing the building to house the rocket goes up in 2004.*



Later that summer, a friend from college came to visit. By then I had bought a camera that could take panoramic photos. Since then, it has become a tradition to visit Rocket Park and take snapshots in front of the Saturn rocket when visitors come to Houston.

Eight years later, the scene at the park has changed. The Saturn V, which was once part of an open-air exhibit, is now enclosed in a temporary building to protect the newly preserved launch vehicle. The doors to this facility opened on July 20, 2007, the thirty-eighth anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission, when the restored vehicle was unveiled to the public for the first time.

The rocket arrived in Houston in the fall of 1977, after a year of negotiations between NASA Headquarters and JSC. More than 750,000 visitors had traveled to Houston to see the exhibits and to learn more about the human spaceflight program, prior to this time. Since they had a particularly “intense interest” in the Apollo and Skylab missions, Center Director Chris Kraft came to believe that visitors could not fully understand the historical significance of these two programs without seeing the launch vehicle, in person. He asked that a Saturn V be transferred to JSC for public display.<sup>1</sup> In May 1977, the NASA Artifacts Committee approved JSC’s request and, just a few months later, the Saturn V arrived in Houston.<sup>2</sup>

Parts came from all across the country to form a complete Saturn V rocket. The Michoud Assembly Facility (LA) held the first stage, while the Kennedy Space Center housed the second and third stages as well as the Spacecraft Lunar Adapter. The Command/Service Module (CSM) was in California.<sup>3</sup> The first

stage to arrive came by barge from Louisiana to Galveston Bay and reached Clear Lake on September 19. Transferring the first stage to its current location, near the JSC visitor parking lot, proved to be particularly difficult. NASA Road 1 had to be closed off, and the rocket had to be moved in the wee hours of the morning, around 1:30 a.m. The generators for the transporters worked sporadically or, in some cases, failed. Eight hours later, the transportation team secured the 33 x 138 foot stage in its new location.<sup>4</sup> In October, the rest of the rocket was shipped by barge to JSC. The CSM arrived in November.

Since then, the Saturn has been part of the permanent exhibit at JSC, serving as a symbol of America’s technological accomplishments. Even though the view from Saturn Lane has changed, as I drive over the bridge on Saturn and gaze upon Rocket Park, I am still awed by, and proud of, NASA’s achievements so many moons ago. ★



**Onlookers watch and wait as the S-1C booster of the Saturn V launch vehicle is transported in 1977 for display at JSC.**

NASA S77-28425

NASA JSC2005E37628



**Multiple layers of the rocket’s exterior paint were removed using ultra-high pressure water jets.**

NASA JSC2006E05153



**For more than two years, the rocket was out of view while the work continued.**

NASA JSC2007E036083



**With restoration complete, the rocket appears as it did the day it arrived at the Center.**