

Re: top ten reasons there'll be faster progress

Source: <http://sci.tech--archive.net/Archive/sci.space.policy/2006-06/msg00957.html>

- *From:* "Jordan" <JSBassior2001@xxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* 28 Jun 2006 01:51:44 -0700
-

Wayne Throop wrote:

My problem with this one is that you can revise and improve suborbital flight all you want, and you're still no farther along than the X15 was, in terms of basic capability. Is there some reason to think this will spill over to orbital capability?

Well, yes. Suborbital and orbital technology are just different aspects of the same technology, which is launch technology in general. If one launches at less than orbital speeds, it's "suborbital"; if one launches at greater than suborbital speeds, it's "orbital." What's even better, there are actual commercial applications of suborbital technology — one being thrill-flights, but another one being very rapid intercontinental air travel. Incidentally, this last application was long seen by science fiction writers, by the 1940's it was a standard component of their fictional futures.

My problem with this is that there has been lots of money to be made for less costly launch capability for some time. Slots for comm satellites, weather satellites, mapping satellites, and on and on. Projects like Iridium might have been profitable if the costs of keeping the satellites up and supplying more were less. So it seems to me there's been economic motive for a long time, and not much has come of it.

A lot has come of it. The *_reason_* why there are multiple space agencies in the commercial launch business today is *_because_* of the satellite launch work. Much that has come of it, though, has been slow and incremental improvements in the safety and reliability of the launchers. This is not as dramatic as, say, a breakthrough leading to an SSTO reusable space ship, but it is *_very_* important to the ability of private companies to get into the business.

It is possible that

Re: top ten reasons there'll be faster progress

governments block progress, such as insisting that the Shuttle program can and should do everything. But even so, if somebody else could launch for a lower price, I don't think they'd have problems getting customers away from the Shuttle.

They have been doing just that, especially after the _Columbia_ disaster.

Note: I'm wearing my skeptical hat here. I *do* see these points, and agree that that they are positive. I am not merely dismissing them, or even attempting to "refute" them. I'm just not very optimistic on how much they will accelerate progress.

They have been doing so visibly in the last few years. You now have space tourism, with at least one large corporation interested in getting into the business and multiple smaller entrants in the field. You also have at least five national space agencies launching orbital payloads, and at least two interested in constructing manned Moonbases. We're seeing a Second Moonrace starting right before our eyes.

Sincerely Yours,
Jordan

.