

Putting The Third Launch Failure of SpaceX's Falcon 1 In Perspective

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The title of the article on MSNBC.com was direct: "Strike three for SpaceX's Falcon 1 rocket." The perfect American phrase for a third failure, and with the "strike three and your out" connotation it gives ammunition to those who believe NewSpace companies like SpaceX cannot succeed. Be assured that those who dismiss NewSpace will anoint this failure with deep majesty and solemn sorrow... and wave it from the highest mountain of self-righteousness; "See, I told you only governments and big space firms can do this."

A little perspective is needed.

Included in the many things NASA does well is its gift to the world of many outstanding historical and research publications. After yesterday's Falcon 1 failure I pulled "Moonport: A History of Apollo Launch Facilities and Operations" (SP-4204) off the shelf to review the Preface, which provides an excellent perspective on launch failures and the challenges faced by the NewSpace industry.

"On 28 July 1960, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) announced a new manned spaceflight program. Called Apollo, its aim was to put three astronauts into sustained earth orbit, or into a flight around the moon. The timing of the announcement was not auspicious. The next day, NASA's first Mercury (MA-1) disintegrated and fell into the ocean 58 seconds after takeoff from Cape Canaveral. This disaster ushered in a bleak four months during which the test rocket Little Joe 5 joined the MA-1 in the ocean, and the first Mercury-Redstone lifted off a fraction of an inch and settled back on the launch pad." (p. xv)

The only difference between success and failure is when you stop.

I have faith in SpaceX.

I have faith in NewSpace.

I have faith in the never-give-up attitude of entrepreneurs who create companies like Google, giving us the Google Lunar X PRIZE prize for which even more entrepreneurs are competing. Governments come and go, public support for space exploration rises and falls, the problems of humanity are ever-changing and challenging, but the passion and spirit of the NewSpace entrepreneur endures... and will ultimately prevail.

Who is John Galt?