

Cinefilm's Final Space Mission

Atlanta, GA: Star Trek fans followed the 'five year mission of the Starship Enterprise' on television over 40 years ago. This month the world watched the landing of Atlantis as NASA's Space Shuttle Missions came to an end after 30 successful years in space. While crews in Florida and Houston were saddened to see the end of an era, so was the team at Cinefilm Lab in Atlanta. For the past five years Cinefilm handled all the film processing and transfer services for the NASA Imaging teams. "We were proud to be part of the 'space team'", boasts Jim Ogburn, General Manager, "as we were a small part of history in space. It was an honor to be selected to manage this very important part of the Shuttle Program."

NASA stages over 60 cameras in both 35mm and 16mm on the ground and in the air to film all Shuttle Missions. These images include high-speed close-up cameras monitoring the firing of the huge booster engines and the separation of the fuel tanks as well as ground positions that follow the lift off down range. All of this negative must be back to the Cape in 24 hours for detailed analysis. "We have crews on stand-by for each launch," explains Lab Manager Tony Bifano, "and the negative is flown in private planes to Peachtree-Dekalb Airport. From there our team processes over 30,000 feet of motion picture film. We are the only film lab between NY and LA that can make positive film prints for the mission team to analyze. Original requirements called for three prints of all the material to ship to Houston, Huntsville, and Cape Kennedy within 24 hours. We work around the clock to meet their deadlines."



Cinefilm Colorist Ron Anderson supervised the film transfer of the final Shuttle Mission in the Spirit / DaVinci 2K suite. HD transfers to QuVis format files of over 60 film cameras that track each launch and landing are handled in Atlanta.

The quality and resolution of 35mm film is required in order to analyze any issues of debris that falls off during launch that could affect the safety of the crew. The film is also transferred to HD data files. Cinefilm Colorist Ron Anderson is probably the first person to see any issues during the telecine process. "While my usual job is to make commercials and feature films have just the right 'artistic color look'," remarks Anderson in the Spirit/ DaVinci suite that looks like a miniature control room of monitors and panels, "NASA wants a very technical, flat exposure, with crisp details to detect any small particles that could affect the mission. I've done this several times a year now, but it's always exciting to watch the angle from the huge booster engines and see the slow-mo image of the sparks that light the gasses to lift the Shuttle off the pad. It's the most powerful engine created by man."

"Partnering with Cinefilm was an excellent experience," remarks Robbie Robinson, Director of Imaging Services for NASA. "They are a very professional team that always responded to our needs and went a step beyond in providing great support. Our relationship will continue on other NASA projects."

While this chapter in space comes to an end, Cinefilm looks forward to future plans and man's next 'small step' into space.