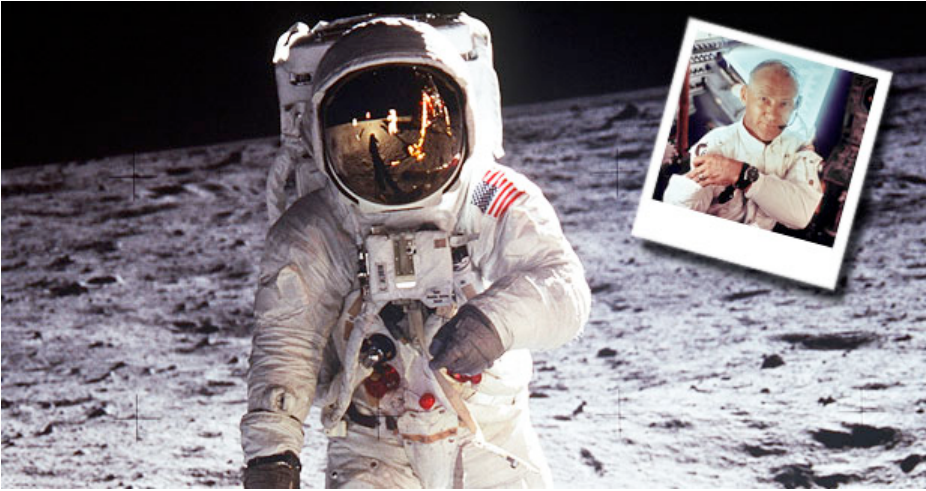


The Buzz on space

By: Fred Watson | August-3-2009

In an exclusive interview with AG, astronaut Buzz Aldrin discusses the future of space exploration and that giant leap.



The astronaut born Edwin E. Aldrin Jr but best known as Buzz – his legal name since 1982 – was the first spaceman without test-pilot experience hired by NASA, which wanted his brain for physics and astronautics and made him one of the first men to walk on the Moon. He remains one of only a dozen people ever to have taken lunar steps. This July marks the 40th anniversary of Apollo 11's precision journey to the Moon and that historic walk.

Buzz has lost none of his drive or curiosity in his 79 years and is a sought-after speaker for his views on the future of space exploration. His opinions are wide-ranging, detailed and bold: no less than one would expect from one of three men (Neil Armstrong and Michael Collins were his Apollo 11 crewmates – Mike orbited the Moon but didn't walk on it) who completed arguably the 20th century's greatest feat of adventure exploration.

"I think the field of astronomy has just burgeoned tremendously in the last 10 years," Buzz says. "I don't think we ever thought that we'd see the kind of returns that we've been able to get from the Hubble Space Telescope. And I think we're going to be just that much more 'gee whiz' impressed by the new telescopes coming [From here to eternity, AG 92]. And to think that we could send satellites, spacecraft, on the grand tour by using gravity assist instead of fuel; the fact that we can run spacecraft around Saturn and multiple passes of the moons... my goodness, nobody would have expected that."

No-one knows better than Buzz that rocketing people into space is in a different league from sending automated probes, but he sees a renewed push for manned space exploration building momentum. "Some things that require building rockets and obtaining money and convincing politicians; they can take a little longer. But we also have [renowned physicist] Stephen Hawking saying that we need another commitment to have another giant leap in space. That's why I'm motivated to look quite a bit beyond the current thinking. Because I want to see Stephen Hawking's 'giant leap'."

Buzz's vision includes the Moon – the place where Neil Armstrong gave the term "giant leap" its most famous airing – as a stepping stone, but his horizon lies further out in space, and he sees it reached through a combination of experience, innovation, long-term planning and greater international cooperation.

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