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Website last updated: 04-18-2016



Club-A-Rama Week 25:

MERCURY SPACE CAPSULE

October 1962

Cape Canaveral, Florida

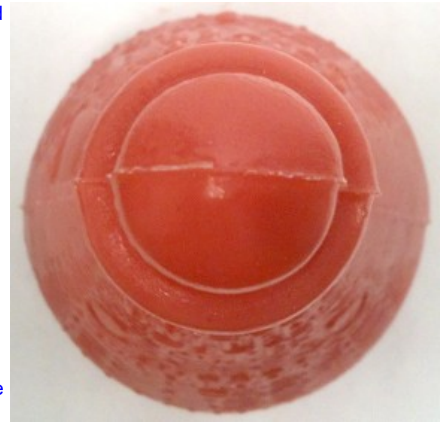


MOLDVILLE's one-year-only Club-A-Rama celebrates the 50th anniversary of many things, not the least of which will be the 50th anniversary of the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. This week's celebrated 50th anniversary is that of John Glenn's achievement as the first American to orbit the Earth on February 20, 1962, in "**FRIENDSHIP 7**". (Russia's Yuri Gagarin was the first human to orbit Earth 10 months earlier.)

The **MERCURY SPACE CAPSULE** figure was originally vended at Cape Canaveral, Florida, and is engraved to commemorate the three most recent (at the time) missions of Project Mercury: "**FRIENDSHIP 7**" (Feb. 1962), "**AURORA 7**" (May 1962), and "**SIGMA 7**" (Oct. 1962).

Project Mercury (a Roman mythical god often seen as a symbol of speed) was the United States' first human spaceflight program between 1959-63 with the goal of putting a human in orbit. The program included 20 unmanned launches, followed by two suborbital and four orbital missions.

Manned spaceflight began for the United States when Alan Shepard blasted off in "**FREEDOM 7**" on May 5, 1961 in a spaceflight that lasted only 15 minutes. Two months later Virgil Grissom repeated the feat in another 15 minute flight in a Mercury capsule he named "**LIBERTY BELL 7**". Then, 50 years ago this week on February 20, 1962, came the 5 hour US space flight that we all remember as it achieved the goal of Project Mercury: John Glenn's three-orbit flight in "**FRIENDSHIP 7**". Scott Carpenter repeated John Glenn's feat in May 1962 in "**AURORA 7**", and Walter Schirra doubled the length of the flight to 6 orbits on October 3, 1962 in "**SIGMA 7**".

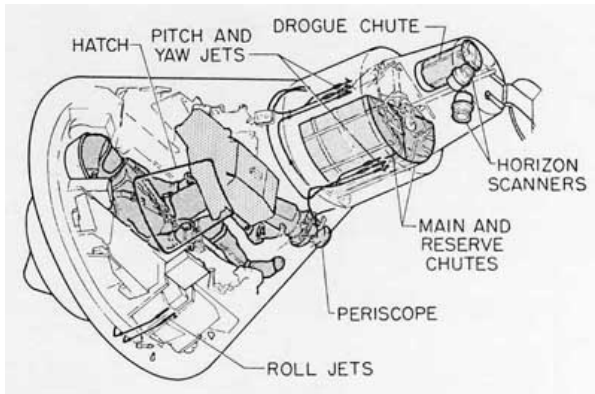


The Mercury space capsule held just one solo astronaut. The "7" in the name of each of the Mercury flights represented the seven original Mercury astronauts, though one of the seven Mercury astronauts, Deke Slayton, never flew on a Mercury spacecraft. He was scheduled to fly in 1962 on the second Mercury flight (which *would* have been named "**DELTA 7**"), but he was grounded in 1959 by a heart murmur. He eventually was granted medical clearance to fly, which he ultimately did in 1975 at the age of 51 as the pilot of the Apollo-Soyuz test project.



One side of the mold includes the engraving "**FRIENDSHIP 7**", the opposite side includes the engraving "**AURORA 7**", and appearing almost as if it was a last-minute addition, engraved on the base of the figure: "**SIGMA 7**".





It's hard to imagine in today's world just how basic and crude the early spacecraft were. And SMALL!



John Glenn's "**FRIENDSHIP 7**" space capsule (above) today is at the Smithsonian's Air and Space Museum, in Washington, DC.

Wally Shirra's "**SIGMA 7**" space capsule (below) today is at the Astronaut Hall of Fame, at the Kennedy Space Center, FL.



Scott Carpenter's "**AURORA 7**" space capsule (above) today is at the Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago, IL. (Thanks to spaceychick.com for these capsule photos!)



There would be one more mission in Project Mercury, in May 1963, before it was concluded having achieved its goal of putting man in orbit. Project Mercury was succeeded by the larger 2-man Gemini program in 1965-66. At left and below is an original mold of the **GEMINI SPACE CAPSULE** from the then newly-named Kennedy Space Center. (Just 5 days after JFK's assassination, Jackie Kennedy suggested to Lyndon Johnson to rename "Cape Canaveral" to instead be "Cape Kennedy," which LBJ did on Nov. 27, 1963.)



As a side note - and also as an indication of just how early and crude space travel was at the time of Project Mercury - the Mercury Space Capsule was first 'manned' by an Astrochimp named Ham. While in sub-orbital space Ham had his vital signs and tasks monitored using computers on Earth. Though Ham's Mercury Space Capsule "**MR-2**" suffered a partial loss of pressure during flight, Ham's space suit prevented him from suffering any harm and he landed safely.

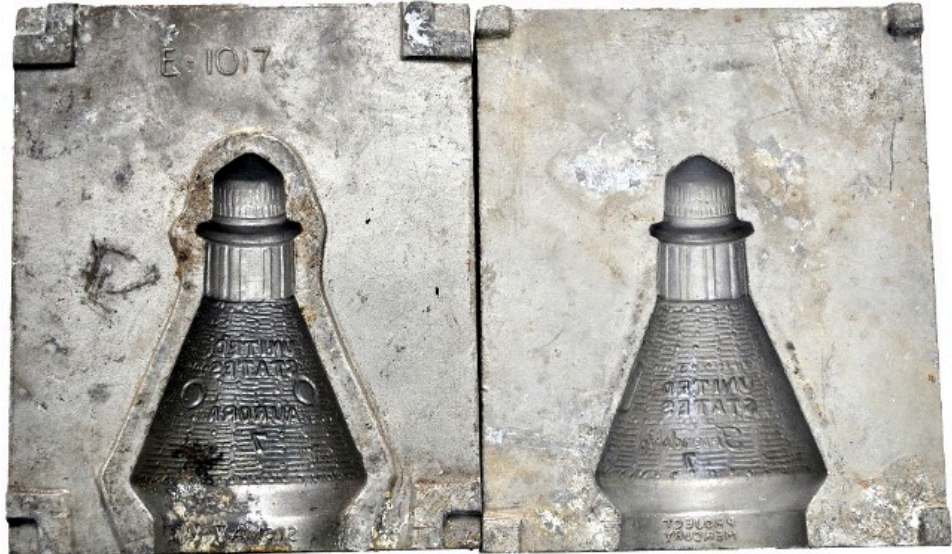


Ham went on to live another 22 years of celebrity.

With the success of "*FRIENDSHIP 7*" and "*AURORA 7*" behind him, the possibilities of space exploration seemed endless. On September 12, 1962, President Kennedy gave his motivating "We Choose To Go To The Moon" speech at Rice University - a speech that officially engaged the United States in the space race started by the Russians. That space race was won just seven years later, on July 21, 1969, when mankind first set foot on the moon. (That was 43 years ago. We haven't been back in 40 years.)



This is an original late 60s/early 70s plexi backglass (from the MOLDVILLE archive.)



The **MERCURY SPACE CAPSULE** moldset is solidly dated to October 1962, both by its serial numbering (its only the 17th in the numbered series), and by the date of the latest Project Mercury mission engraved on it ("**SIGMA 7**", which blasted off on October 3, 1962.)

Disclaimers: The color and/or exact condition of the MOLD you get in the CLUB-A-RAMA may or may not be as shown. Not for children under 3.

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