

Rocket Failure Brings Favorable Fame

Private Effort Ended In Launch Explosion

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WASHINGTON — A small Texas company that failed dismally in its attempt to launch the nation's first privately developed spaceship toward earth orbit last month has learned a lesson about the vagaries of public opinion familiar to generations of Hollywood press agents and publicity hounds:

It doesn't matter what you say about me, just get my name in the paper.

David Hannah, Jr., president of Space Services, Inc., says those photographs of his 55-foot rocket exploding in a gigantic ball of flame that appeared in newspapers around the world actually have proven beneficial in some respects. They generated much-needed public awareness about the private space venture, termed the "Percheron Project," and sparked the interest of potential customers, job seekers, and even Congress.

Mr. Hannah, in fact, was called to testify Tuesday before the House Committee on Science and Technology, which is gathering information on space goals. He promised the committee that Space Services will make another launch attempt by the end of next year,

Launched From Texas Island

"I think we already have proven that we can build an inexpensive space vehicle," he said. "What we don't know is whether we can build one that will work."

Mr. Hannah, describing how photographs of the aborted launch appeared in newspapers as far away as India, said he and his associates were "amazed" at the response. Potential customers called

to encourage continuation of the project. There were calls and letters from aerospace engineers who wanted to work for Space Services. Insurance agents called to see if they could write coverage for the firm. And even the National Aeronautics and Space Administration got into the act by offering to analyze the reasons for the explosion.

The launch attempt took place Aug. 5 from a cattle ranch on Matagorda Island in Texas. Percheron (named for a breed of large French draft horses) was developed with "off-the-shelf" technology by a group of 20 scientists, engineers, and technicians, some of whom were retired NASA employees. Mr. Hannah, a wealthy real estate developer, arranged \$1.2 million in financing for the project.

Built With Government Designs

Everything from Percheron's single rocket engine, which burns cheap kerosene and liquid oxygen, to its guidance system was built with Government designs available to commercial users.

Its goal is to make the first step to-

ward the exploitation and commercialization of space by private entrepreneurs. The Percheron rocket is designed to carry small payloads (such as remote sensing oil exploration cameras) into low earth orbit at a cost about 30 to 40 per cent less than that of NASA's existing launch vehicles. Eventually, communications satellites would be launched into higher orbits.

The first commercial launches would be capable of carrying payloads of only a few hundred pounds into orbits of just over 100 miles. But capacity would slowly increase to payloads of thousands of pounds in the lucrative 22,500-mile geosynchronous orbit used by communications satellites.

Percheron would be America's first private commercial space launch service — for hire by anyone. A private West German firm is planning similar launches from a test site in Libya.

'Make The Frontier Accessible'

"Historically, the United States has opened and developed new economic, scientific, and physical frontiers by fostering partnerships between government and industry," Mr. Hannah told the committee. "Government has fulfilled its responsibility to open the new frontier of space, and it now is incumbent upon Space Sciences and all the companies which will follow to make the frontier accessible for industrialization and commercialization."

Mr. Hannah predicted that there eventually will be "a host" of other private companies formed to exploit the commercial and industrial potential of space. He urged Congress to create an agency that would regulate the construction and flight of rockets in much the same fashion that the Federal Aviation Administration regulates the commercial airline industry.