

Endeavour lands at LA airport after aerial tour (Update)

September 21 2012, by Alicia Chang



Space Shuttle Endeavour mounted on NASA's Shuttle Carrier Aircraft, passes over the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Friday, Sept. 21, 2012. Endeavour is making a final trek across the country to the California Science Center in Los Angeles, where it will be permanently displayed. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

Space shuttle Endeavour landed safely at the Los Angeles International Airport Friday after a whirlwind aerial tour around California landmarks.

Strapped to the back of a 747 jumbo jet, the pair touched down around 1 p.m. after a nearly five-hour flyover. One of the crew members stuck an American flag out of the hatch of the jet.

The flyover took Endeavour over the state Capitol, Golden Gate Bridge, Hollywood Sign and other icons en route to the Los Angeles airport, where the shuttle will be prepped for a slow-speed journey to its museum home next month.

At the Santa Monica Pier, spectators pointed their cameras skyward and some chanted, "USA! USA!" as Endeavour swooped along the coast.

"Even though it was a few seconds, it was a unique experience to witness history," said Andrew Lerner, 23, of Santa Monica.

Thousands of spectators jammed rooftop buildings and streets in Sacramento, cheering as Endeavour made two loops around the state Capitol. A crowd of schoolchildren squealed in delight during the second flyover.



Space Shuttle Endeavour, mounted on NASA's Shuttle Carrier Aircraft (SCA), flies near parasailers in Santa Monica, Calif., Friday, Sept. 21, 2012. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

Matthew Montgomery took a break from his work as a legislative aide and brought his 2-year-old son, Tavion, to see Endeavour airborne.

"I was going to leave him in daycare but thought this is a once-in-a-lifetime deal," said Montgomery, whose aunt was an engineer on the early Apollo missions.

Since Endeavour buzzed by some of the Golden State's most iconic sights, law enforcement and transportation authorities warned motorists not to "gawk and drive."

"We want people to take in this majestic show," Los Angeles police

Cmdr. Scott Kroeber said earlier this week. "But if you're driving, please drive and don't try to take in the show simultaneously."

Traffic came to a near stop along a freeway near the NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory east of Los Angeles when motorists pulled off to the shoulder to watch. California Highway Patrol officers came through and blared on loud speakers for people to move on.

Extra officers were on duty along the freeways near the airport to make sure traffic flowed smoothly as the shuttle zoomed overhead.

Endeavour returned to its birthplace Thursday after an emotional cross-country ferry flight that made a special flyover of Tucson, Arizona, to honor its last commander, Mark Kelly, and his wife, former Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

NASA's shuttle fleet, which retired last year after three decades of flight, was assembled in Palmdale near Edwards Air Force Base where Endeavour took off Friday morning for the aerial tour. The military outpost 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of Los Angeles served as the original shuttle landing strip and remained a backup site in case of stormy weather at Cape Canaveral, Florida.



The Space Shuttle Endeavour sits atop NASA's Shuttle Carrier Aircraft (SCA) at the NASA Dryden Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base, Calif., Thursday, Sept. 20, 2012. Endeavour returned to its California roots after a wistful cross-country journey that paid homage to NASA workers and former Arizona Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and her astronaut husband. (AP Photo/Jae C. Hong)

"We're so excited to be welcoming Endeavour home in grand style with these flyovers," Jeffrey Rudolph, president of the California Science Center, said earlier this week.

The youngest shuttle, Endeavour replaced Challenger, which blew up during liftoff in 1986. NASA lost another shuttle, Columbia, in 2003 when it disintegrated during re-entry. Fourteen astronauts were killed.

During 25 missions, Endeavour spent 299 days in space and orbited Earth nearly 4,700 times, racking up 123 million miles (198 million kilometers).

On its maiden flight in 1992, a trio of spacewalking astronauts grabbed a stranded communications satellite in for repair. It also flew the first repair mission to the Hubble Space Telescope to fix a faulty mirror. But most of its flights ferried cargo and equipment to the International Space Station, which is near completion.

Under White House orders to explore beyond low-Earth orbit, NASA is hitching rides on Russian rockets to the orbiting laboratory until private companies can provide regular service.

Endeavour is the second of three remaining shuttles to head to its retirement home. In April, Discovery arrived at the Smithsonian Institution's hangar in Virginia. Atlantis, which closed out the shuttle program, will stay in Florida where it will be towed a short distance to the Kennedy Space Center's visitor center in the fall.

Endeavour will remain at an airport hangar for several weeks as crews ready the shuttle for its own road trip. Unlike Atlantis, it will creep through city streets to the California Science Center near downtown.

Some 400 trees will be cleared along the 12-mile (19-million kilometer) route to make room, a move that has riled some residents in affected neighborhoods. Museum officials have pledged to replant double the number of chopped trees.

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