

Shuttle inches toward retirement home at LA museum

October 13 2012, by Alicia Chang



The space shuttle Endeavour makes it's way down Manchester Blvd. over a closed 405 fwy in Inglewood, Calif., Friday, Oct. 12, 2012. Endeavour's 12-mile road trip kicked off shortly before midnight Thursday as it moved from its Los Angeles International Airport hangar en route to the California Science Center, its ultimate destination. (AP Photo/Chris Carlson)

At every turn of Endeavour's stop-and-go commute through urban streets, a constellation of spectators trailed along as the space shuttle

ploddingly nosed past stores, schools, churches and front yards.

Having escaped out of Earth's atmosphere two dozen times, [Endeavour's](#) slow-speed trek Saturday to its retirement center took it through the working class streets of southern Los Angeles.

In an instant, the shuttle crossings became part of history.

Along the 12-mile (19-kilometer) course, people marveled at the engineering. Some rooted for Endeavour when it appeared it might clip a lightpost. Others wondered if it could just hurry up to its destination.

Crowds gathered in front of Inglewood High School before sunrise Saturday to watch Endeavour roll by at about 2 mph (3.2 kph). Many were bundled up sipping coffee.

Dean Martinez, who lives in Los Angeles but works in Inglewood, came with his wife and 9-year-old daughter.

"This is great for the city as a whole. It makes us proud," said Martinez, a project director for a nonprofit whose family took turns taking pictures of one another as the shuttle slowly inched by.

Added his wife, Marcia, "It's a big deal especially for this neighborhood. It's important to witness history and for our children to experience it."

Endeavour was scheduled to inch into the California Science Center late Saturday to spend the rest of its years as a museum piece.

Before it did, the shuttle made a late-morning pit stop at the Forum, where it was greeted in the arena's parking lot by a throng of cheering spectators. After crawling up Crenshaw Boulevard, the shuttle was scheduled to stop for a bit at the intersection with [Martin Luther King Jr.](#)

Boulevard. A celebration was planned, including speeches by politicians and a dance performance choreographed by Debbie Allen.

Endeavour hit the pavement before dawn Friday, trundling out of the [Los Angeles International Airport](#) on a remote-controlled 160-wheel carrier past diamond-shaped "Shuttle Xing" signs. The first day of the move was punctuated by long idle spells as crews reconfigured the carrier and leapfrogged ahead on the route to hoist power lines and dismantle traffic lights and street signs.



The Space Shuttle Endeavour is slowly moved across Interstate 405 by a Toyota Tundra, Friday, Oct.12, 2012, in Los Angeles. The shuttle is on its last mission—a 12-mile creep through city streets. It will move past an eclectic mix of strip malls, mom-and-pop shops, tidy lawns and faded apartment buildings. Its final destination: California Science Center in South Los Angeles where it will be put on display. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

The pace picked up Friday night when the five-story-tall shuttle was towed over a freeway overpass by a truck (The mated shuttle and carrier were too heavy for that section.) Next to the freeway, Randy's Donuts roadside sign, featured in movies such as "Iron Man 2," landed another cameo as a shuttle backdrop.

There were bumps in the road. Several hundred Inglewood residents suffered hours-long outages when power lines were temporarily cut. Some businesses lost customers because of street and sidewalk closures.

For most of the way, Endeavour straddled wide boulevards—Manchester, Crenshaw, Martin Luther King Jr. The one exception was when the shuttle poked through a slightly curved residential street lined with apartment buildings on both sides. It was such a squeeze that its 78-foot (24-meter) wingspan towered over driveways.

John Wilkes, 69, a longtime Inglewood resident, woke up five hours earlier than usual to stake out a spot.

"This is definitely a treat," said Wilkes, who is retired from the airline industry. "But what would be a better treat is to be able to take a ride on the shuttle."

As it wound through South Los Angeles, residents welcomed its presence. Before the move, some lamented over the loss of shade as trees were chopped down to provide clearance.

When Endeavour rolls down King Boulevard, special attention will be paid to the pine trees planted in honor of the slain civil rights leader.

Endeavour may have circled the globe nearly 4,700 times, but its roots are grounded in California. Its main engines were fabricated in the San

Fernando Valley. The heat tiles were invented in Silicon Valley. Its "fly-by-wire" technology was developed in the Los Angeles suburb of Downey.

It's no longer shiny and sleek like when it first rolled off the assembly line in the Mojave Desert in 1991 to replace Challenger, which exploded during liftoff in 1986, killing seven astronauts. As it cruised block-by-block, it's hard to miss what 123 million miles (198 million kilometers) in space and two dozen re-entries can do to the exterior.

"You can sense the magnitude of where it's been," said Janet Dion, a family therapist from Manhattan Beach, fixating on the heat tiles that protected the shuttle during the return to Earth.

Shuffling Endeavour through city streets was a laborious undertaking—nearly a year in the making. It could not be taken apart without damaging the delicate tiles. Airlifting it was out of the question. So was driving on freeways since it was too massive to fit through underpasses.

"This is unlike anything we've ever moved before," said Jim Hennessy, a spokesman for Sarens, the contract mover.

Once movers settled on the route, the neighborhoods with a front-row seat were transformed. Some 400 trees were cleared with the promise of replanting later. Telephone, cable and power lines were lifted sky-high. Chunks of steel plates were laid down to prevent the streets from buckling and to protect underground utilities.

It'll take days or weeks before a sense of normalcy is restored. In the case of the trees, it'll be years before the newly planted grow to adult height.

Such a move is not cheap. The cross-town transport was estimated at \$10 million, to be paid for by the science center and private donations.

Endeavour's transport followed other [shuttle](#) moves. Earlier this year, Discovery taxied to the Smithsonian's annex hangar in Virginia. The prototype Enterprise was pulled by barge to the Intrepid Sea, Air and Space Museum in New York City.

Next month, Atlantis, which remained at its Cape Canaveral, Florida, home base, will be towed short distance to the Kennedy Space Center visitor's lobby.

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