

## Starting a Complex Space Plane Design Project for the Sky and Beyond

Levus Klyatis\*

Department of Aerospace Engineering, Xiamen University, Xiamen, China

### DESCRIPTION

Space travel has long captured the human imagination, invoking images of sleek spacecraft soaring beyond Earth's atmosphere. Among the innovative vehicles that bridge the gap between airplanes and rockets, space planes stand out for their unique ability to transition seamlessly between atmospheric flight and space exploration. This article explores the fascinating world of space plane design, delving into the science, challenges, and promising future of these extraordinary vehicles.

### Defying gravity the essence of space planes

Space planes represent a remarkable fusion of aviation and space exploration technologies. Unlike traditional rockets, which are expendable and operate in a single-use fashion, space planes are designed to take off from conventional runways, ascend like airplanes, and then ascend further into space. This dual-mode operation makes them versatile vehicles that can carry payloads, satellites, and even passengers to low Earth orbit or beyond.

### Key elements of space plane design

**Aerodynamic design:** At the core of every space plane is its aerodynamic design, enabling it to navigate the Earth's atmosphere and beyond. Engineers meticulously optimize wing shapes, airfoil profiles, and control surfaces to ensure stable flight during takeoff, ascent, reentry, and landing. These design considerations are crucial to minimize heat buildup during reentry and provide pilots or passengers with a safe and comfortable experience.

**Propulsion systems:** Space planes employ a combination of air-breathing engines and rocket propulsion. During atmospheric flight, air-breathing engines draw oxygen from the atmosphere, similar to an airplane. As the vehicle ascends and air density decreases, rocket engines take over, allowing space planes to achieve the high speeds required to enter space. This hybrid propulsion system optimizes fuel efficiency and performance during different phases of flight.

**Thermal protection:** The transition from space to the Earth's atmosphere subjects space planes to extreme heat due to air

compression. Ingenious thermal protection systems are integrated into the design, such as heat-resistant tiles, ablative materials, and advanced coatings. These technologies ensure that the vehicle's structure and occupants remain safe during reentry.

**Reusability:** A defining feature of space planes is their reusability. Unlike traditional rockets that are discarded after a single use, space planes can return to Earth, undergo maintenance, and be relaunched multiple times. This paradigm shift in space travel has the potential to drastically reduce the costs associated with accessing space and make space tourism a reality.

### Challenges in space plane design

Designing a space plane is not without challenges. The intricate balance between aerodynamics and the demands of space travel requires innovative solutions. Ensuring the vehicle's structural integrity during rapid transitions between atmospheric and space conditions is a paramount concern. Moreover, achieving reliable propulsion systems that seamlessly transition from air-breathing to rocket mode poses complex engineering challenges.

The thermal stresses experienced during reentry are another hurdle. Space plane designers must carefully select materials that can withstand the extreme temperatures generated during atmospheric entry while ensuring the safety of the crew or payload.

### Promising space plane projects

Several space plane projects have captivated the aerospace industry and the public alike

**SpaceX starship:** SpaceX's starship is a fully reusable spacecraft designed for interplanetary travel. With the capacity to carry both crew and cargo, it aims to revolutionize space travel by enabling missions to Mars, the moon, and beyond. Its sleek design and innovative heat shield technology hold the promise of interplanetary exploration.

**Sierra nevada corporation's dream chaser:** Dream chaser is a space plane designed for cargo and crew missions to low Earth orbit. Its compact size and runway landing capability make it an

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**Correspondence to:** Levus Klyatis, Department of Aerospace Engineering, Xiamen University, Xiamen, China, E-mail: levuskl481@harvard.edu

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attractive candidate for transporting astronauts and supplies to and from the International Space Station.

**Skylon space plane:** Skylon, developed by strong, is an ambitious space plane concept that aims to achieve single-stage-to-orbit flight. Its innovative SABRE engine combines air-breathing and rocket technologies, allowing it to take off and land like an airplane while reaching orbital velocities.

### **The future of space planes**

Space plane design is at the forefront of aerospace innovation. As technology advances, can anticipate even more efficient and capable space planes, capable of reaching higher altitudes, exploring the moon and Mars, and making space travel a routine endeavor. The potential for point-to-point suborbital travel, where

passengers could travel across the globe in a matter of hours, adds an exciting dimension to the future of aviation and space exploration.

### **CONCLUSION**

Space plane design embodies the spirit of pushing boundaries and embracing the convergence of aviation and space exploration. These remarkable vehicles hold the promise of democratizing space travel, making it accessible to not only astronauts but also researchers, tourists, and commercial entities. As engineers continue to refine the intricacies of design, space planes are poised to become the modern-day vessels that unlock the cosmos for generations to come.