

# CLASSIC DRIVER

## [Snapshot, 1977: Space Shuttle Enterprise takes a leap of faith](#)

### Lead

It's 12 August 1977, and around 40 miles out of Edwards Air Force Base in California, Space Shuttle Enterprise - engineless and mounted atop a specially adapted Boeing 747 - prepares to make its maiden free-flight approach and landing...

For the first time since the re-entry of Apollo 17 - the sixth and final successful Lunar mission - in 1972, NASA is once again capturing the imagination of millions of Americans with the first free-flight of the revolutionary new Space Shuttle orbiter, which was christened Enterprise after staunch protests by thousands of Trekkies across the country. Flanked by two NASA T-38 sighting jets, Enterprise will shortly be jettisoned from its carrier Boeing 747, after which Commander Fred Jr. (of Apollo 13 fame) and Pilot Gordon Fullerton will carry out an unpowered approach and landing to assess the orbiter's atmospheric handling and structural loads ahead of the Space Shuttle's first operational missions to orbit in several years' time. After the separation manoeuvre, during which the 747 will enter a shallow dive, Enterprise will descend the 24,000 feet towards the runway four times as quick as a regular passenger airliner, and at over twice the speed. But in the deft hands of Haise Jr. and Fullerton, and thanks in part to the Shuttle's cutting-edge computer system, the touchdown will go almost exactly to plan.

*Photo: National Aeronautics and Space Administration ©*

### Gallery

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