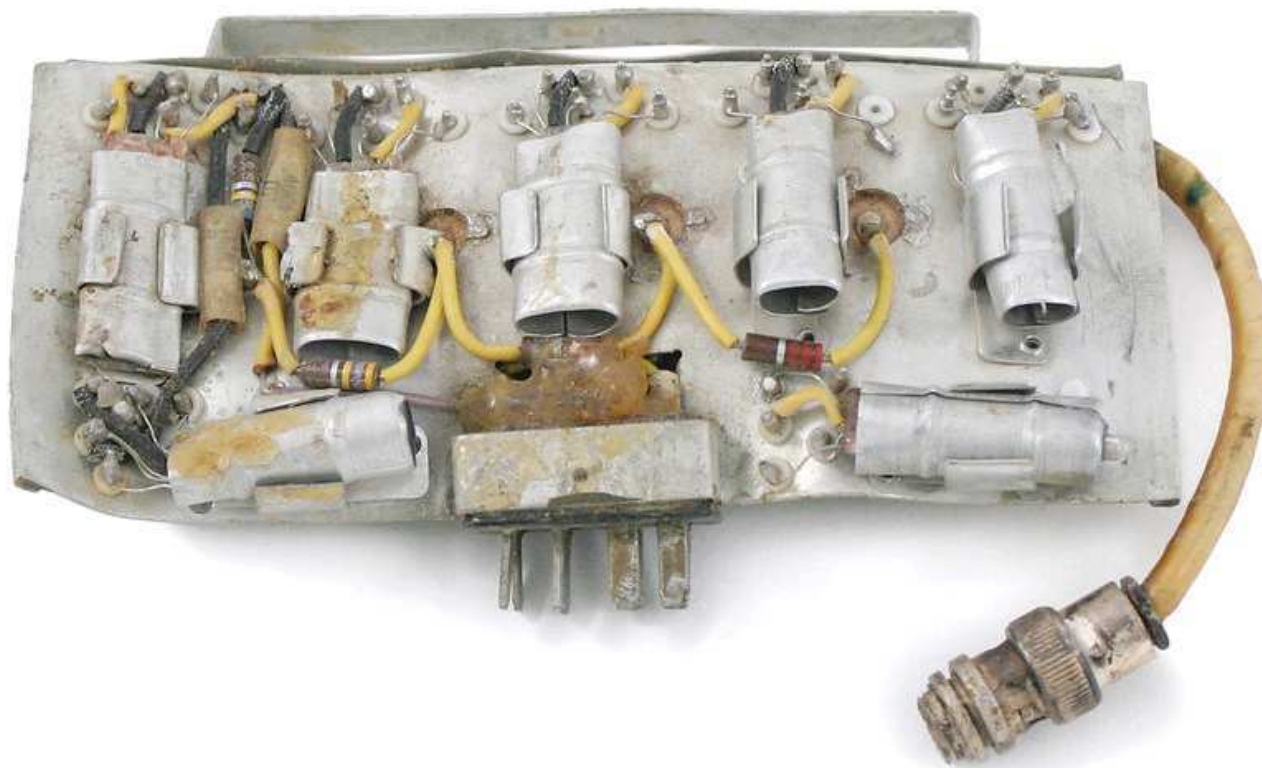


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For Sale: Slightly Used Spacesuit, \$500K OBO

By Alexis Madrigal [✉](#) April 13, 2009 | 5:36 pm | Categories: [Space](#)



On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union became the first country to launch anything into space. The event set off a space race that eventually landed humans on the moon and encircled the Earth with satellites. But a second, smaller race began at the same time. A small, dedicated group of fans began to find, collect and authenticate the physical objects associated with man's out-of-this-world journeys.

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Now there is a bustling business in the detritus of space flight. Several auctioneers host major sales during the spring where hundreds of pieces can be sold for between a few hundred bucks and a few hundred thousand. Starting April 16, Regency-Superior will host a [four-day auction](#) featuring an ultra-rare spacesuit used for testing in the Gemini program (see video) along with dozens of other [rare items, photographs and space hardware](#).

For the people who devote their lives and time to collecting, it's not just a hobby or even an avocation. They see themselves as guardians of a deeply important trove of objects from the first generation of human spaceflight. It might be fun, but it's not a game.

"I'm only a custodian. It's my duty as a collector to make sure that the next generation will receive it in as good or better shape that I have it," Roy Gutzke, an electronics engineer from Toronto, said of his prize possession, a Russian spacesuit worn during the *Soyuz 15* mission. "If you get a bit of stardust in your veins, it stays in there and you can't get it out. It gives you a sense of wonder once in a while. You go outside, you look at the moon, you look at your wall and you go, 'Wow.'"

Space memorabilia collecting has gathered new steam with the help of networking tools that connect a hard-core group of about 500 collectors. Many of them first met on Compuserve and Prodigy — where they traded stories and memorabilia. Those collectors now hang out on dedicated sites like [CollectSPACE](#), which has 25,000 registered accounts and about 2,000 active users.

The supply of artifacts from the space program, however, continues to come from the same old sources. Pieces pop up seemingly at random from the thousands who worked on the programs that sent people into orbit or built the shuttle, said Alan Lipkin, a space memorabilia expert with Regency-Superior.

"Some comes from collectors who picked it up over the years at garage sales or government surplus. Some comes from astronauts themselves who have stuff left over and their wife sees it at home and says get rid of it. Some comes from people at NASA who were in the space program, desk workers, clerical workers, engineers, scientists," said Lipkin. "I've got things that were flown to the moon that were used by astronauts to paint their houses, coveralls that had been in space."

Finding and securing these leftovers from humanity's triumphant flights into the great beyond often lead the collectors into getting acquainted with astronauts. They become historians of a very particular type.

"I've been a collector for over 30 years. I've had a passion for the space program since I was a kid. I used to watch them bopping around up there on the moon," Gutzke said. "I started writing to some of the astronauts and they made a very bad mistake and answered me. That set me off on a bit of a passion for collecting. I actually started making friends with some of the astronauts like Jim Irwin."

Though they run in the same circles, space collectors don't all like the same objects. Each of the mostly male collectors has his own niche. Some of them like the astronaut-as-celebrity stuff: autographs, photographs, hand-written notes, etc. Others like the flags and patches that were flown into space. And then there are the hardware folks, who search for heat shields and solar panels, and even larger pieces of metal scavenged from dumps near the major NASA research stations. And what they find themselves collecting seems less a choice than a calling.

In 1968, Ken Havecotte, who has been collecting for more than 30 years, moved with his parents to Merritt Island, Florida.

"Viewing my first 'live' rocket launch from the Cape that same year was simply awe-inspiring for me," Havecotte wrote in an email to Wired.com. "So much, that in fact, I have attended — as an eyewitness to space history up close — every manned U.S. space shot since 1968, including all Apollo-related liftoffs and every space shuttle launch to date!"

He began collecting newspaper clippings about space, which he still has, and ended up devoting his life to the pursuit and preservation of objets d'espace. Now he has one of the broadest collections around including, "flown-in-space items, astronaut-owned memorabilia, vintage Space Age autograph material, flown-used space hardware, astrophilately/postal covers, badges, original manuscripts, full collections of aerospace personalities, vintage-era photos and literature, launch pad relics, and much more."

Robert Pearlman, the 33 year old collector who runs CollectSPACE, caught the bug from Havecotte. Pearlman saw a story about the collector in a newspaper, his artifacts arrayed behind him, and sent the older

man a letter. It just so happened that Havekotte had a long standing policy of providing a "free packet of space goodies to avid space fans," and so one day a package showed up at Pearlman's door.

Buy a Piece of Space History



A gallery of images from the
Regency-Superior Space Auction

"I wrote to him and said, 'How do I get started in this?' And he sent me a big box of stuff," Pearlman said. "I still have most of the contents of that box. I was 13 or 14 years old."

Alongside the collectibles was a piece of wisdom that helped Pearlman find his particular niche.

"It had a note from him that said to look through the box, find what excites me, and then specialize," Pearlman said. "What really struck my fancy were the small bits and pieces that had been in space. A couple tiny little pieces of the *Apollo 13* command module heat shields and some gold-covered foil that had covered the *Soyuz* test module."

Pearlman had discovered that he was a hardware man.

The jewel of Pearlman's collection is [a hatch manufactured for the International Space Station](#) — "a 4-foot-by-4-foot, 200-pound aircraft-grade piece of aluminum" — which one of his collector buddies found at a recycling center in Alabama.

"He called me and said, 'You won't believe what I found.' I had it trucked down to Houston, where I am," Pearlman said. "I live on the third floor of a walkup. I had to call four companies to find someone who was willing to help me move it."

Gutzke doesn't collect the hardware. He sticks more to the soft stuff: flags and patches, in particular. But he's discerning about where those things have been.

"There are three levels. First is something that's been flown in space. That could be something on the Shuttle or when they went to the moon. The next level that would be something that landed on the moon," he said. "The final level is the stuff that actually ended up on the surface of the moon. Those are the holy grail of the hobby."

Gutzke, a Toronto-native, has both American and Canadian flags that made it to the moon.

No matter what their specialties, collectors tend to be united in the awe they hold for spacesuits, which

combine the engineering of the hardware with the humanity of the astronaut items. Lipkin said the Gemini suit in the upcoming auction is the first American spacesuit they've seen in more than a decade.

Gutzke said it "knocked his socks off" and Pearlman called it "phenomenal" and "one of the holy grails of hardware collecting." That excitement is why the Gemini spacesuit could go for between \$300,000 and \$500,000.

Most of the objects in the auction, though, will fetch much smaller, but still considerable, sums. A transmitter sent up on an Aerobee rocket could go for \$2,000 (top image). A urine bag for \$300, maybe. Hubble solar cells for \$1,000. A Saturn V gyroscope for \$10,000.

So, if you're tired of collecting Battlestar Galactica, get your credit card ready because stardust for your veins doesn't come cheap.

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Posted by: [KVM Switch](#) | 04/13/09 | 10:00 pm

nice collection dear,
dont sell them keep with you as a memory.

Regards
Jennifer Luec

Posted by: Neil | 04/13/09 | 10:50 pm

Does anyone have used nickel porous plate ice sublimator for sale? Surely, with all the moonwalks and ISS spacewalks, there must be at least one available somewhere? No? Ain't nobody gettin a gander at one of them babies.

Cuz they don't exist cuz it's all a hoax.
In your face!

Posted by: Shum | 04/13/09 | 10:54 pm

April fools was a few days back, no?
-SH

<http://antiagingview.blogspot.com/>
