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00:00:00,710 --> 00:00:05,267

Narrator: Throughout the Space Shuttle Program, a familiar launch-day sight was the shiny silver

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00:00:05,267 --> 00:00:08,157

vehicle known as the Astrovan.

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00:00:08,157 --> 00:00:13,318

Before each launch, astronauts smiled and waved as they left crew quarters and boarded the van that

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00:00:13,318 --> 00:00:18,250

would carry them to meet their fully fueled ride to space.

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00:00:18,250 --> 00:00:23,155

The vehicle would wind its way across NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida as it carried the

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00:00:23,155 --> 00:00:25,057

crew to the launch pad.

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00:00:25,057 --> 00:00:29,597

It was an exciting ride for the crew members, but especially for the rookies ready for their first

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00:00:29,597 --> 00:00:31,332

trip to space.

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00:00:31,332 --> 00:00:35,042

STS-135 Pilot Doug Hurley: The first time is just everything about it is just, you know, the anticipation,

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00:00:35,042 --> 00:00:42,973

excitement, you know, you're a little bit nervous, but it's just neat to know that, you know,

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00:00:42,973 --> 00:00:47,512

you're one in a series of a very long line of astronauts who've rode in this vehicle going to the pad,

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00:00:47,512 --> 00:00:50,117

you know, for flight to space. It's pretty cool.

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00:00:50,117 --> 00:00:54,378

Narrator: Early shuttle crews had fewer astronauts so they rode to the launch pad in an

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00:00:54,378 --> 00:00:57,022

Apollo-era transport van.

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00:00:57,022 --> 00:01:02,902

But since 1984, each shuttle crew travelled those nine miles aboard the current vehicle.

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00:01:02,902 --> 00:01:09,888

The modified Airstream motor home only racked up about 27,000 miles in its 27 years of service.

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00:01:09,888 --> 00:01:14,898

That's because it's used solely to transport the astronauts for each mission.

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00:01:14,898 --> 00:01:17,938

STS-135 Commander Chris Ferguson: I always associate this vehicle with flying,

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00:01:17,938 --> 00:01:21,530

because you only get in here twice. You get in here for TCDT, which, of course,

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00:01:21,530 --> 00:01:24,923

is the launch rehearsal, and then launch day.

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00:01:24,923 --> 00:01:29,500

Narrator: The only other time the Astrovan was used was to take the astronauts back to crew quarters

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00:01:29,500 --> 00:01:31,513

after landing.

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00:01:31,513 --> 00:01:36,737

The vehicle's appeal is rooted in its tradition rather than its decor.

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00:01:36,737 --> 00:01:41,423

Ferguson: It's not really extravagant it's kind of like bench seating. And it's pretty crowded on launch

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00:01:41,423 --> 00:01:46,470

day, especially with a crew of seven I think everyone's trying to cut the tension with a joke or two from

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00:01:46,470 --> 00:01:47,898  
time to time."

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00:01:47,898 --> 00:01:52,310

Narrator: The interior's narrow center aisle is paralleled by long benches.

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00:01:52,310 --> 00:01:57,362

Lift-out sections accommodate the ventilator units used to circulate cool air through the astronauts

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00:01:57,362 --> 00:02:00,362

bulky orange launch-and-entry suits.

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00:02:00,362 --> 00:02:06,478

Ferguson: This is the only place that they have liquid air. And liquid air is really, really good.

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00:02:06,478 --> 00:02:12,677

You know we have this cooling garment that circulates water cooling and in the hot Florida sun it's

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00:02:12,677 --> 00:02:18,435

nice to have it. But they plug that liquid air into you and it just blows this cool air throughout your suit,

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00:02:18,435 --> 00:02:22,183

and it's really nice because it actually dries you, and the only place we get to have it is in here.

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00:02:22,183 --> 00:02:26,248

And I don't know why but it's like a special treat on launch day.

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00:02:26,248 --> 00:02:30,552

Narrator: And while each crew no doubt had their own unique take on their ride to the launch pad,

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00:02:30,552 --> 00:02:36,747

shuttle Atlantis STS-135 mission crew took in the significance of the final ride for the

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00:02:36,747 --> 00:02:38,837

Space Shuttle Program.

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00:02:38,837 --> 00:02:42,428

Ferguson: It was really special this time because there were so many people here.

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00:02:42,428 --> 00:02:47,362

And I think even though it's kind of an anxious time as you head out to the launch pad because you

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00:02:47,362 --> 00:02:51,487

know this might actually be the day, on this particular day, you know the last flight,

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00:02:51,487 --> 00:02:55,907

I think we were all amazed at how many people showed up.

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00:02:55,907 --> 00:03:02,062

but even on the road, you hang the right turn to go to the pad, and the road was lined with people

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00:03:02,062 --> 00:03:08,672

waving American flags. It made me feel good, you know, to know that the shuttle program meant this

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00:03:08,672 --> 00:03:13,248

much to so many people, and not just national, but international. I mean, a lot of people turned out to

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00:03:13,248 --> 00:03:16,840

watch, you know, the grand finale, if you would.

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00:03:16,840 --> 00:03:20,747

Narrator: While the vehicle won't be taking any more shuttle crews to the launch pad,

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00:03:20,747 --> 00:03:28,207

NASA plans to keep it ready to ferry future astronaut crews to the pad.

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00:03:28,207 --> 00:03:31,758

Hurley: I would like to keep this tradition. I don't know if any of us will get to fly on the next vehicle,

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00:03:31,758 --> 00:03:37,558

whatever that vehicle may be, U.S. vehicle. It would be kind of neat to have some of it be the same.

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00:03:37,558 --> 00:03:41,547

STS-135 Astronaut Sandy Magnus: Actually traditions are important in a business like this to keep

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00:03:41,547 --> 00:03:42,927

everybody connected.

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00:03:42,927 --> 00:03:50,400

Ferguson: Everybody ready? Hold on everybody.

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00:03:50,400 --> 00:03:56,010

Narrator: So, after riding the Astrovan to the launch pad a number of times, what would it be like if a

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00:03:56,010 --> 00:04:00,000

space shuttle commander got the keys to take it for a spin?

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00:04:00,000 --> 00:04:03,793

STS-135 Commander Chris Ferguson found out.

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00:04:03,793 --> 00:04:07,020

Ferguson: 0-to-35 in a minute-and-a-half!