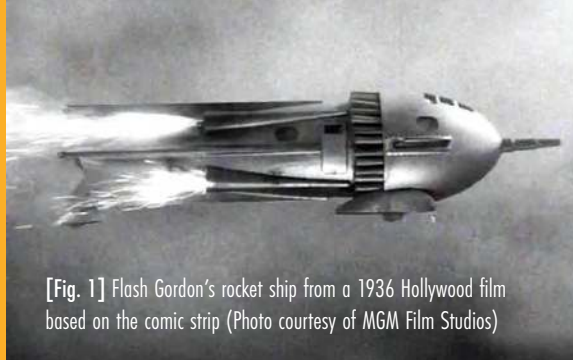


# ACL CORNER #2

[Mike Dickman]



[Fig. 1] Flash Gordon's rocket ship from a 1936 Hollywood film based on the comic strip (Photo courtesy of MGM Film Studios)



**ON** October 4, 1957, America was stunned when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) unexpectedly launched Sputnik 1 into orbit around the Earth. This launch of the first satellite triggered an avalanche of public anxiety about the technological superiority of our rival superpower. The anxiety only increased a few years later when the Russians sent cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin into the first-ever manned orbital flight above the Earth. These seminal events led to the creation of NASA in 1958 and President John F. Kennedy's 1961 pledge to send Americans to the Moon by the decade's end. President Kennedy's promise was fulfilled on July 20, 1969.

The so-called Space Race, which began in the late 1950s and continued through the successful landing of our Apollo 11 on the Moon in 1969, created great interest among Americans in what the 1960s TV series *Star Trek* called "Space: The Final Frontier." The keen public interest in all things space was not lost on the bottlers of soda pop, who were always looking for ways to entice consumers to spend a nickel on their products. And what a wonderful array of ACL soda bottles they created!

Let's look at some of these bottles.

The term "rocket" as an interplanetary transport vehicle was popularized in the 1930s by the comic-strip character Flash Gordon, who traveled by rocket to the fictional planet Mongo to do battle against its evil ruler, Ming the Merciless. (Figure 1) The red-and-white soda named "Rocket Beverages" (Figure 2) was made by the Red Rock Bottling Co. of Longmont, Colorado, in 1965. It depicts a rocket soaring through the clouds toward outer space. Another bottle with the same image, but all in white, was produced by the Grapette Bottling Co. in nearby Greeley, Colorado, also in 1965.

[Fig. 3] Rocket Beverages from Greeley, Colorado, 1965



[Fig. 11 above right] Launched in 1973, NASA's Pioneer 11 was the first spacecraft to explore the planet Saturn and continues its journey through outer space to this day. It is expected to reach the nearest star, Lambda Aquila, in approximately 4 million years. (Illustration courtesy of NASA)

(Figure 3) It's anybody's guess why companies located 35 miles apart and owned and managed by different people would have shared a product name as well as the same ACL. Perhaps there was

[Fig. 4] Rocket Beverages from Columbus, Ohio, 1962

a family relationship or other personal connection that is not apparent from the corporate records. In any event, both bottles are popular and relatively scarce but available. A nice example of the all-white ACL bottle typically may cost \$35-\$75, while the red-and-white version from Longmont typically may cost \$100-\$150.

A different soda brand, also named "Rocket Beverages," was bottled in Columbus, Ohio, by the Rocket Beverage Company in 1962. The bottle sported a light-blue-and-white ACL showing a rocket ship traveling above the Earth. It held 12 ounces of pop and is very rare. I was able to obtain a photo



[Fig. 5] Space Ship from "Rocket City" Huntsville, Alabama, 1958

*Antique Bottle & Glass Collector*





[Fig. 14] On July 20, 1969, the American side of the Space Race reached a successful milestone when astronaut Neil Armstrong became the first human being to walk on the Moon. (Photo courtesy of NASA)

[Fig. 6] Jet-Up in green glass, 1959

of the bottle from one of the few collectors who own an example (Figure 4).

Figure 5 shows the “Space Ship” brand of soda pop depicting a rocket ship with the saying, “Taste to New Heights.” It was put up by the Huntsville Seven Up Bottling Company in Huntsville, Alabama, in 1958, the year that the United States government created NASA. As often was the situation with local products, the brand probably didn’t last long, and the bottle today is extremely hard to find. Huntsville is nicknamed “Rocket City” and is the site of the George C. Marshall Space Flight Center, established in 1960 and currently NASA’s largest facility.

“Jet-Up with Space-Age Beverages” (Figure 6) was a soda pop bottled in Grove City, Pennsylvania, by the Nemo Bottling Works in 1959, just after the Space Race had begun. The

back of the bottle has the dumb (in my opinion) slogan, “Get the Taste You’ve Been Missing, Blasting Off and Climbing High.” The manufacturer of the bottle used green glass, which creates a dramatic contrast with the red-and-white ACL. The company also put up the soda in a clear glass bottle with a white ACL, slightly different in design, and made it a few years later in 1962 (Figure 7). The green glass bottle is rarer and more expensive and does not come up for sale often. A nice all-white version of the bottle sold in June 2022 for a modest \$45, including postage.

On July 8, 1947, the U.S. Army Air Force in Roswell, New Mexico, announced the “capture” of a crashed “flying disc” on a nearby ranch. Although the Army quickly retracted the story in favor of a weather balloon,

[Fig. 7] Jet-Up in clear glass, 1962



[Fig. 9] Zee Beverages, 1959

flying saucers from outer space entered the popular imagination. Some Americans speculated that our astronauts might encounter a flying saucer on their way to the Moon. (Figure 8) “Zee Beverages” from Erie, Pennsylvania (Figure 9) was bottled by the Zee Beverage Co. in 1959. The blue-and-white ACL depicts a little flying saucer zooming off into space.

Although not a common bottle, Zee Beverages do appear for sale from time to time. In May of 2022, a nice example sold on eBay for \$50, including postage.



[Fig. 10] Saturn Club Soda, 1961

[Fig. 15] The maiden launch of the U.S. Space Shuttle Columbia on April 12, 1981, which was about the same time that the commercial use of ACLs on soda bottles in the U.S.



was coming to the end, replaced by aluminum cans and plastic bottles. During the next thirty years, NASA utilized Columbia and four other Space Shuttles to fly 135 missions into space. (Photo courtesy of NASA)



[Fig. 8] Headline from the Roswell Daily Record, July 9, 1947. Although the Army Air Force press release used the term “flying disk,” the newspaper editors changed the object to a “flying saucer” for dramatic effect, a term that has stuck over the decades. (Photograph courtesy of the Roswell Daily Record, Roswell, NM)





[Fig. 12] Universe, The Taste Treat Out of This World, 1963

urn ACL bottle. In the 1990s, the late Tom Marsh, an ACL aficionado and bottle dealer, acquired the inventory of the defunct Saturn Beverage Company, including multiple cases of the bottles (with 24 bottles per case). Tom started selling them at shows for \$20 per bottle. Subsequently, however, his storage building burned to the ground and his entire stock of bottles was destroyed. A veteran collector recalls Tom Marsh describing how he stood outside the building watching it burn and how the sound of the glass bottles popping brought tears to his eyes. Today, the Saturn Club Soda is rarely offered and undoubtedly would cost more than \$20.

“Universe” was a soda pop made by the North Side Bottling Works of Latrobe, Pennsylvania, in 1963 (Figure 12). Its slogan was “The Taste Treat Out of This World” and it contained seven ounces of soda.

“Saturn Club Soda” was put up in 28-ounce bottles with a red, white, and blue ACL (Figure 10). The soda was bottled in 1961 by the Saturn Beverage Co. of Buffalo, New York, and attempted to capitalize on the public’s interest in the Space Race by billing itself as “The Space Mixer.” The ACL depicts the planet Saturn with one of its rings, surrounded by twelve little stars. The planet Saturn is the sixth from the Sun, is visible with the naked eye, and has been known to humans since prehistoric times. The Romans named “Saturday” after the planet. NASA’s Pioneer 11, a crewless probe, was the first spacecraft to fly past Saturn in 1979 and was followed by Voyager 1 in 1980 and other later probes. (Figure 11)

Although some collectors avoid large-size bottles (though others collect them enthusiastically), Saturn has a particularly vibrant, three-color ACL and is desirable to most collectors.

There is an interesting side story to the Sat-

The year 1963 saw NASA’s first successful planetary flyby mission (Mariner 2, past Venus) and the successful testing of NASA’s first reusable piloted spacecraft (Flight 90 of the X-15 vehicle).

Finally, “Solo” (with the slogan, “High in Quality” depicting a fully suited astronaut outside his spacecraft above a planet), is another soda bottle that is rarely found. (Figure 13) The soda was bottled in San Juan in the U.S. Territory of Puerto Rico and likely was made during the height of the Space Race during the 1960s. It has an all-white ACL and contained 330 ml of soda pop (approximately 11 oz.). The space suit shown on the ACL is remarkably accurate. (Figure 14)

Today, the USSR is long gone, and Americans dominate what’s left of the Space Race through private, for-profit enterprises such as Space X (Elon Musk), Blue Origin (Jeff Bezos), and Virgin Galactic (Richard Branson). NASA is planning a second trip to the Moon and other exciting space ventures in the years and decades to come. (Figure 15) The ACL soda bottles discussed in this article are folksy, tangible reminders of the earliest days of the Space Race.

**CREDIT:** Photos of “Rocket” from Columbus, Ohio, and “Space Ship” courtesy of Timothy Brent Miller, who has a wonderful collection of ACL sodas that can be seen on his FaceBook page, Tim A.C.L. Miller; photo of the all-white ACL “Jet-Up” courtesy of Anna Vaporis; all of the other photographs of bottles are by Chris Weide ©2022.



[Fig. 13] Solo, High in Quality, circa late 1960s

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