

'The Real Right Stuff' is an interesting highlight reel of Project Mercury

Written by By Glenn Kay For the Sun
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Rating: <<<< **out of** <<<<<

Running Time:
89 minutes

The following feature will be available for streaming Nov. 20 on Disney+.

Many kids dream of becoming astronauts and flying into the stars and even adults are wowed by images of the Earth from outer space. Only last year, the documentary *Apollo 11* impressed audiences and critics with its use of newly discovered, high-quality footage chronicling man's first trip to the moon.

The Real Right Stuff

from Disney and

National Geographic

goes back even earlier in time, showing the beginning of U.S. space exploration during the 1950s and 1960s. The footage on display here isn't quite as awe-inspiring, but this movie is interesting and does shed some light on the early participants in the program.

If anything, it's a highlight reel of Project Mercury and the first seven American astronauts. The events are constructed using interview footage and audio with author Tom Wolfe (who wrote *The Right Stuff*, which is considered an authoritative book on the subject). He describes the Space Race in detail, giving factoids about the contest between the U.S. and Russia to send a man into orbit.

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The filmmakers cut together remarkable newsreel and television footage and use rare photographs to define the experiences of these men in training, as well as their early missions.

Coming on the heels of another film that features newly restored footage of astronauts traveling to the moon, some of these early trips into the upper atmosphere can't impress in quite the same way. Thankfully, the movie instead spends some time with those involved in the program itself, even detailing the rivalries that formed within the group of cocky pilots. As viewers see footage of the first press conference involving the astronauts, the movie asserts that John Glenn made the biggest impression on interviewers, who enjoyed his sense of humor and "countrified sophistication" while speaking in public. While few would think anything of such a short meeting, the event does begin to incite minor fractures and rivalries within the competitive group.

Other interesting revelations that the documentary briefly addresses, include the wives and families of the astronauts signing contracts with *Life Magazine*. They were essentially on call for comments about their husbands and the footage shows the stress of having the press present during mission launches. Another enlightening disclosure this documentary deals with is the attention that these new astronauts received from women and their different ways of handling being a celebrities. Overall, this space story is most intriguing when dealing with the personal lives of the astronauts.

While there could have been even more detailed admissions, the Wolfe audio does add fascinating points about the unexpected troubles these men encountered.

Naturally, the film also presents individual missions involving specific individuals and the trials of getting themselves safely home. Viewers witness some of the dangers encountered, although the excitement will be negated for older viewers, who already know how most of these trips concluded. The movie does seem to rush through many of its story points and doesn't really stay on any specific subject for too long. Even the last couple of Mercury Missions only receive a quickly put-together montage.

So, while the final product isn't as striking or memorable as the recent *Apollo 11* film or even the 1983 biopic *The Right Stuff*

(not to mention another new drama series on the subject that is also debuting on Disney+ this week), there is still some interesting footage and a few quick asides that do provide greater insight into the space program. Those who remember these missions or anyone who might be a

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young space enthusiast will certainly learn a few interesting things about these remarkable men and their attempts to break new frontiers in space.

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