OBERTH CLASS

LAUNCHED: 23rd C
LENGTH: 120 METERS
CREW COMPLEMENT: 80
Contents

04: OBERTH CLASS
10: PRODUCTION DESIGN ON STAR TREK III
16: BUILDING & FILMING THE SHIP
18: ON SCREEN

Stand assembly:

EAGLEMOSS COLLECTIONS

OBERTH CLASS

CLASS: OBERTH

LAUNCHED: 23rd CENTURY

LENGTH: 120 METERS

CREW: 80 (STANDARD)

WEAPONRY: PHASER BANKS

CAPTAINS: J.T. ESTEBAN, ERIC PRESSMAN

www.startrek-starships.com
The Oberth class was an extremely successful design of Federation starship that was in service from at least as early as 2285 to as late as 2375, nearly a century later. It was primarily designed to conduct science and research missions, and was often deployed to record, analyze and study unusual spatial phenomena. The secondary role of the Oberth class was to act as supply and transport vessels. For example, in 2367, the U.S.S. Cochrane NCC-59318 was used to transfer Admiral Norah Satie to the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D so that she could investigate a case of possible Romulan espionage. In addition, an Oberth-class vessel assisted in recovering the crew of the Enterprise-D from Veridian III, following the crash-landing of its saucer section there in 2371. In emergencies, Oberth-class vessels were even deployed in battle. They took part in both of Starfleet’s major conflicts with the Borg at the Battle of Wolf 359 in 2367 and at the Battle of Sector 001 in 2373, and they were even part of fleet engagements during the Dominion War.

DISTINCTIVE DESIGN

Although instantly recognizable as a Federation starship, the Oberth class had an unusual design. The most notable aspect of its construction was that its secondary hull was connected to the rest of the ship only through the nacelle pylons. The overall length of an Oberth-class ship was roughly 120 meters, and the standard number

THE OBERTH CLASS

The Oberth class was an enduring design of starship that was mostly used to study astronomical phenomena.
In 2358, Captain Erik Pressman was in command of the U.S.S. Pegasus while it was being used to test an illegal cloaking device. During the trials, the crew mutinied and Pressman was forced to abandon the ship. It appeared to be destroyed shortly after with all hands and Pressman never faced justice. It was not until 2370, when the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D discovered the wreckage of the Pegasus, that the truth emerged and Pressman was arrested.

In 2368 the S.S. Vico NAR-18834 was operating with an entirely civilian crew while investigating a black cluster, one of the most ancient known astronomical formations in the galaxy. In keeping with its primary role as a research vessel, the Oberth class was equipped with numerous science labs. One area, located in the saucer section, was a corridor-like chamber that featured science consoles and small monitors against the wall. Another section, known as science ops, contained multiple computer consoles and a personnel transporter pad.

Although specialized for scientific missions, Oberth class ships featured many of the systems found on other types of Starfleet vessels. They were capable of high warp speeds, and were equipped with transporters and phasers. They also utilized specialized shields, as they often had to enter dangerous regions of space in order to study them. This shielding was supplemented by the use of immensely strong victurium alloy in the construction of the bulkheads to help maintain the integral structure of the hull when it was subjected to the stresses of powerful spatial phenomena.

In 2285, the U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638 was investigating the newly formed Genesis Planet when it was destroyed by a single disruptor blast from a Klingon Bird-of-Prey, whose crew were hoping to acquire the Genesis device. In 2364, the entire crew of the S.S. Tsiolkovsky NCC-1701-D escaped a similar fate as it bounced a repulsor beam off the Tsiolkovsky to push itself clear of danger.

In 2358, most of the crew of the Oberth-class U.S.S. Pegasus NCC-53847 were lost while the ship was being used to test an illegal Federation cloaking device. After an explosion in engineering, the ship drifted through a large asteroid before decloaking, leaving parts of it encased in rock.

In 2366, the entire crew of the S.S. Tsiolkovsky NCC-53911 died after they became infected with a variant of the Psi-2000 virus while monitoring the collapse of a super red dwarf star. The ship was destroyed soon after when it was hit by a stellar core fragment, and the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D escaped a similar fate as it bounced off the Tsiolkovsky to push itself clear of the fragment.

Not all Oberth-class vessels were crewed by Starfleet personnel. The S.S. Vico was operating with a civilian crew when its hull was sheared off in several places by gravitational wavefronts while exploring the interior of a black cluster. Hull breaches led to a loss of atmosphere on several decks of the ship and the entire crew, apart from a small boy named Timothy, were lost.

When the Enterprise-D was stuck in the path of a stellar core fragment, the tractor beam was modified to produce a repulsor beam that was bounced off the S.S. Tsiolkovsky to push itself clear of danger.

The U.S.S. Pegasus served as a prototype for an illegal Federation cloaking device. After an explosion in engineering, the ship drifted through a large asteroid before decloaking, leaving parts of it encased in rock.
**BRIDGE AND CREW QUARTERS**

The bridge on Oberth-class ships was found on the upper level of the saucer section and was arranged in a similar configuration to most Starfleet ships. Located at the front of the bridge was a viewscreen, with the side-by-side navigation and helm consoles directly in front of it. The captain’s chair was in the middle of the room with the primary science station to port and secondary science consoles trailing along the wall to the back of the bridge. A communications station was positioned to the starboard side of the captain. The bridge also featured an emergency hatch set into the bulkhead, which led directly into space.

The crew quarters found aboard Oberth-class vessels included a main living area, with an attached bedroom and adjacent bathroom.

**SHIP PROFILE OBERTH CLASS**

Oberth-class starships were named in honor of Austro-Hungarian-born German physicist Hermann Oberth. He is considered one of the founding fathers of modern rocketry and astronautics.

Oberth-class ships were in service as early as 2285. The dedication plaque on the S.S. Tsiolkovsky stated that it was commissioned in 2363, proving that new Oberth-class ships were still being constructed nearly 80 years later.

William T. Riker’s first posting after he left Starfleet Academy was aboard the Oberth-class U.S.S. Pegasus. He was the ship’s conn officer, and his youthful appearance earned him the nickname of “Ensign Babyface.”

**RCS thrusters**

**ROCKET SCIENTIST**

**ENSIGN RIKER**

**LONG PRODUCTION**

Oberth-class starships were in service as early as 2285. The dedication plaque on the S.S. Tsiolkovsky stated that it was commissioned in 2363, proving that new Oberth-class ships were still being constructed nearly 80 years later.

**DATA FEED**

The Oberth-class U.S.S. Pegasus featured escape pods that could accommodate at least nine personnel at once.
The designers of the new starships in *STAR TREK III* also helped to create the look of the entire movie as their stunning concept art shows...

The Oberth class, and indeed all the new starships that appeared in *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*, were designed by the art department and model shop at Industrial Light & Magic (ILM). The art department for the movie basically consisted of David Carson and his boss, Nilo Rodis. Together, they looked through a three or four page outline of the story, tried to identify shots that ILM would be involved with, and work out how to make them as memorable as possible.

“Whatever I was concerned with,” Rodis recalled, “was finding images that stuck in your mind. You know, if you go to an art gallery, some pictures just stop you dead in your tracks? That was what I had to think about; how do I make you stop dead in your tracks?”

The outline they were working with was basic, but it proved to be very close to the finished script. As Carson explained, he and Rodis would simply produce sketches for moments that inspired them.

**MUTUAL INSPIRATION**

“We’d churn out quite a few sketches,” said Carson. “Then the ones that were most promising we might polish up a little in color for presentation. It wasn’t uncommon for me to do a drawing that would inspire Nilo, who would then turn it into his own drawing that would be much more impressive! He would often inspire me.”

Carson went on to say that, because they were involved so early in the process, they felt free to make suggestions about how things could look and work, and in some cases this actually influenced the story that was still being finalized by writer-producer Harve Bennett and director Leonard Nimoy.

“Whatever I was concerned with,” Rodis recalled, “was finding images that stuck in your mind. You know, if you go to an art gallery, some pictures just stop you dead in your tracks? That was what I had to think about; how do I make you stop dead in your tracks?”

**Visual effects art directors Nilo Rodis and David Carson played a vital role in helping to define the look of *STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK*. They produced dozens of sketches for the most dramatic moments of the movie, including this one of the Klingon Bird-of-Prey and the Genesis Planet.”**

“The outline they were working with was basic, but it proved to be very close to the finished script. As Carson explained, he and Rodis would simply produce sketches for moments that inspired them.”

**MUTUAL INSPIRATION**

“We’d churn out quite a few sketches,” said Carson. “Then the ones that were most promising we might polish up a little in color for presentation. It wasn’t uncommon for me to do a drawing that would inspire Nilo, who would then turn it into his own drawing that would be much more impressive! He would often inspire me.”

Carson went on to say that, because they were involved so early in the process, they felt free to make suggestions about how things could look and work, and in some cases this actually influenced the story that was still being finalized by writer-producer Harve Bennett and director Leonard Nimoy.

“What was great was that, as we began doing sketches, they could come up with ideas that were based on our artwork,” said Carson. “For example, the outline said that the Enterprise was going to dock at this space station where they would see the Excelsior. I was trying to work out how we could make that space station interesting, and I thought...
‘What if it is so big that the Enterprise actually goes into it?’ I did a drawing of a space station that was big enough. It was a bit clunky, but Nilo took that and in his typical fashion turned it into a really wonderful design. So we presented this idea and that led to the incident where they are trying to fly the Enterprise out of the door before it closes. Obviously, Harve [Bennett] came up with that story point, but it started with a visual that we produced.”

Rodis remembered that Spacedock’s distinctive mushroom shape came out of his desire to insure that STAR TREK had its own, unique, design ethic.

“We pitched a whole bunch of design ideas to Harve [Bennett] and Leonard [Nimoy],” said Rodis. “I wanted to make sure it had nothing whatsoever to do with ‘Star Wars,’ so it was more reality-based in its own STAR TREK way.”

VIRTUAL ENVIRONMENTS

The exterior shots of the spaceships were handled entirely by ILM. However, there were other shots where Rodis and Carson’s work overlapped with that of the art department at Paramount. This was headed up by production designer John Chilberg (who died in 1987); he worked with set designer Cameron Birnie and illustrator Tom Lay.

Cameron Birnie remembered that he was somewhat surprised by ILM’s level of involvement. “It was the first time that I recall where the visual effects department was giving instructions to the art department rather than the other way round,” said Birnie. “We did a scene where the Bird-of-Prey lands on Vulcan. I thought we were building the inside of the spaceship, the door, the ramp down, and then the environment that they were coming down to. They said, ‘No, you don’t have to do any of that. All we need you to do is build the ramp and the doorway.’”

The rest of the shot, which showed the mountainside, a stairway carved into the rocks, and the temple on Mount Seleya, was created by ILM, using matte paintings and elements that were filmed on different locations.

Paradise Turned to Hell

In the case of Genesis, Rodis said he probably did go further than anyone expected. “I was really, unbelievably bold and naïve in my younger days,” said Rodis. “I’d done a sketch of this that shows you paradise all the way to hell. I remember building a miniature of that set and flying it down to LA. I pitched it to Harve and Leonard, saying the best way to show snow is in the desert because when you have images that don’t belong together
visually that tells you that something is drastically wrong. I remember I actually had powdered dust with me. I dropped this powder on the model and said, ‘See it works!’”

COMPLEX SET
Rodis’s concepts clearly influenced the design of the set, but the task of actually building the Genesis Planet fell to the Paramount art department. As Birnie remembered, the set involved a lot of complex rigging so that the ground could be pulled apart to create fissures that flames would erupt from. “That was handled by special effects,” said Birnie, “but the art department watched over so we worked with them on physical things like floors falling through.”

Genesis was built on Stage 15, which was one of the largest on the Paramount lot, and the sheer scale of the set meant that the art department took a slightly unusual approach to creating the final design. “We made a model of the set and reworked it and reworked it until we got it just right,” said Birnie. “Then, rather than draw every single section to show them how to build the set, they took the model down to the stage and put it through a band saw. Every quarter of an inch they cut a section out of the model, then they laid each section on quarter inch grid paper and traced it. And then they gave each section to a different carpenter and said build that.”

Rodis and Carson were also involved with the designs for the bridge of the Klingon Bird-of-Prey and the bar where McCoy is arrested, but again the designs were finalized at Paramount, where the sets were built.

VISIONS OF VULCAN
Both departments worked on the designs for Vulcan. In particular, Carson remembered spending days developing alternative designs for an area called the Hall of Ancient Thoughts, through which the crew would have passed on their way to the temple where Spock was resurrected. Carson said, “We wrestled quite a bit with trying to come up with an impressive number of environments that you pass through that could be constructed for a reasonable budget, and ultimately we failed! The Hall of Ancient Thoughts actually became the Hall of Nothing, because it was too expensive. I did this great drawing – it was a bunch of people on a submerged river, poling along on this barge. I knew as I was drawing it there was no chance. When Harve and Leonard looked at it, they said, ‘Yeah, that would really be great but there’s no way.’”

Rodis and Carson were also involved with the designs for the bridge of the Klingon Bird-of-Prey and Carson remembered that Leonard wanted the crew to make a journey up to the temple after they had landed, not least because it would be expensive to add the Bird-of-Prey to the shots of the temple.

SIMPLE AND DRAMATIC
“Leonard wanted a narrow passageway, a thoroughfare, for dramatic purposes,” said Rodis. “The best way to do that was with a matte painting showing where the Bird-of-Prey landed relative to the temple that they were going to walk up to. From my experience, you have 15 seconds for that shot. The logistical implication of those 15 seconds has got to be very clear. It cannot be cluttered otherwise it won’t stick in your memory.”

Ultimately, that was what Rodis believed his job was about – taking a design for a movie and making sure that it served its purpose. STAR TREK III proved that everything that was designed had to work together. “At the end of the day,” said Rodis, “you would be designing maybe 150 visual effects shots. But what’s important was what it was contributing to the story. What I remember more than anything was Leonard generosity. He put the onus on me to tell him what everything looked like, and he really influenced my decision to leave ILM. I realized that it was not enough for me to just design 150 shots; it was more important for me to design the entire movie.”
The Oberth class was designed to be merely cannon fodder for the Klingons, but the model proved to be far more enduring.

When envisaging the initial concept for the Oberth-class U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638, visual artist Nilo Rodis of Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) was very aware that its design had to be seen in relation to the entire movie and the other ships. The point of the U.S.S. Excelsior NX-2000 was that it was more modern than the Enterprise, while the Klingon Bird-of-Prey had to be menacing. The Grissom also had a particular purpose in the story, but it was something entirely different. “It was fodder for the Klingons,” said Rodis. “I wanted you to see it, but I didn’t want you to remember it because we were going to blow it apart anyway. With the Grissom, my design impetus was to make sure that even though it looked like another ship in the same family, it didn’t steal the Enterprise’s thunder.”

Once a design direction for the Grissom had been established, it was handed over to model makers Steve Gawley, Bill George and their team, who then built a basic study model of it to show producer Harve Bennett and director Leonard Nimoy. “The Grissom was the smallest model,” said Gawley. “As a matter of fact it was probably only double the size of the maquette (about 28 inches long). The reason was that we didn’t see it up close, so we didn’t need a large model.”

While the Grissom had relatively little screen time in the movie, it was far from the last time that the model appeared in the franchise. In fact, it made a brief appearance in the next film, STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME, where it was seen inside Spacedock relabelled as the U.S.S. Copernicus NCC-6440. The model was next used to depict the S.S. Tsiolkovsky NCC-53911 in the STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION episode ‘The Naked Now.’ The model was seen again as the U.S.S. Cochrane NCC-59318 in THE NEXT GENERATION fourth season episode ‘The Drumhead,’ and as the U.S.S. Yosemite NCC-19002 in the sixth season episode ‘Realm of Fear.’ It made its final screen appearance as the U.S.S. Pegasus NCC-53847 in the seventh season episode ‘The Pegasus.’ Interestingly, a second studio model of the Oberth class was built to represent the S.S. Vico NAB-18864 in THE NEXT GENERATION fifth season episode ‘Hero Worship.’ As the story called for the ship to be shown severely damaged, the original studio model was deemed too valuable to cut up, so the model makers at Gregory Jein Inc. took molds of the original ILM model and cast the parts to construct a new model that could be torn up.

The original studio model was sold at auction in 2006, still labelled as the U.S.S. Pegasus, for $21,600. The final appearance of the Oberth class was in the Battle of Sector 001 in STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT, where it was rebuilt as a CG model.
TRIVIA

Actor Terry O’Quinn played the part of Admiral Erik Pressman in the STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION episode ‘The Pegasus.’ The production staff were so impressed with his performance that executive producer Michael Piller considered using the character in an episode of STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE, but the idea never reached fruition. O’Quinn is perhaps best known for his role as John Locke in the J.J. Abrams-produced television series ‘Lost.’

The U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638 was named after astronaut Gus Grissom, the second American to fly in space. He was the designated commander of the aborted Apollo 1 mission, who died in the tragic Apollo 1 fire on 27 January 1967.

The Oberth class, the Excelsior class, the Spacedock-type station, and the Klingon Bird-of-Prey all made their first appearances in STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK. These designs continued to be used for many years after in the various screen incarnations of STAR TREK.

FIRST APPEARANCE:
STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK

TV APPEARANCES:
STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION; STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE

DESIGNED BY:
Nilo Rodis and David Carson

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION ‘THE PEGASUS’
Admiral Erik Pressman boards the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D with a top secret assignment to retrieve his former ship, the U.S.S. Pegasus NCC-53847. It was lost 12 years earlier, but has recently been found, and their mission is to recover it before the Romulans get to it. Riker served with Pressman aboard the Pegasus and knows what really happened. The Pegasus was being used to test an illegal cloaking device, and Riker realizes that if he reveals the truth, it could end the peace treaty between the Federation and the Romulans.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION ‘THE OBSIDIAN’
The U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638 was named after astronaut Gus Grissom, the second American to fly in space. He was the designated commander of the aborted Apollo 1 mission, who died in the tragic Apollo 1 fire on 27 January 1967.

Oberth class, the Excelsior class, the Spacedock-type station, and the Klingon Bird-of-Prey all made their first appearances in STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK. These designs continued to be used for many years after in the various screen incarnations of STAR TREK.

KEY APPEARANCES
STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK
Admiral Kirk and his bridge crew risk their careers stealing the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701 in order to return to the restricted Genesis Planet so that they can recover Spock’s body. Meanwhile, the Oberth-class U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638 is conducting a scientific study of the Genesis Planet when it is destroyed by a rogue Klingon Bird-of-Prey. Its captain wants the power of the Genesis device for himself and is prepared to go to any lengths to get it. Kirk finds himself faced with having to make huge personal sacrifices if he is to defeat the Klingons and be reunited with Spock.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION ‘THE PEGASUS’
Admiral Erik Pressman boards the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D with a top secret assignment to retrieve his former ship, the U.S.S. Pegasus NCC-53847. It was lost 12 years earlier, but has recently been found, and their mission is to recover it before the Romulans get to it. Riker served with Pressman aboard the Pegasus and knows what really happened. The Pegasus was being used to test an illegal cloaking device, and Riker realizes that if he reveals the truth, it could end the peace treaty between the Federation and the Romulans.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION ‘THE OBSIDIAN’
The U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638 was named after astronaut Gus Grissom, the second American to fly in space. He was the designated commander of the aborted Apollo 1 mission, who died in the tragic Apollo 1 fire on 27 January 1967.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION ‘THE PEGASUS’
Admiral Erik Pressman boards the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-D with a top secret assignment to retrieve his former ship, the U.S.S. Pegasus NCC-53847. It was lost 12 years earlier, but has recently been found, and their mission is to recover it before the Romulans get to it. Riker served with Pressman aboard the Pegasus and knows what really happened. The Pegasus was being used to test an illegal cloaking device, and Riker realizes that if he reveals the truth, it could end the peace treaty between the Federation and the Romulans.

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION ‘THE OBSIDIAN’
The U.S.S. Grissom NCC-638 was named after astronaut Gus Grissom, the second American to fly in space. He was the designated commander of the aborted Apollo 1 mission, who died in the tragic Apollo 1 fire on 27 January 1967.

Inside your magazine
- In-depth profile of the Andorian Battle Cruiser, the powerful warship in service with the Andorian Imperial Guard in the mid-22nd century
- Production illustrator John Eaves talks about his Andorian designs
- A look at how the writing staff brought the Andorians back

www.startrek-starships.com

COMING IN ISSUE 37