SABER CLASS

TYPE: LIGHT CRUISER
LAUNCHED: 24th C
LENGTH: 223 METERS
MAX SPEED: WARP 9.7
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SAKER CLASS

SPECIFICATION

** TYPE: LIGHT CRUISER **

** IN SERVICE: 24TH CENTURY **

** LENGTH: 223 METERS (APPROX.) **

** CREW: 40 **

** TOP SPEED: WARP 9.7 **

** WEAPONRY: TYPE-10 PHASER EMITTERS, TORPEDO LAUNCHERS **
At approximately 223 meters in length, the Saber class was a relatively small type of 24th-century Starfleet vessel that operated with a standard crew of 40. The entire ship was a similar size to the saucer section of a Galaxy-class starship, while its nacelles were attached to it via short pylons, giving it a rugged and powerful appearance.

A Saber-class vessel, such as the U.S.S. Yeager NCC-61947, featured an irregularly-shaped saucer section, while its nacelles were attached to it via short pylons, giving it a rugged and powerful appearance. Compact and well armed, Saber-class ships were involved in battles with the Borg and the Dominion in the 24th century.

Saber-class vessels were part of the Second Fleet, a Federation Alliance force which fought in the Dominion War. This fleet comprised of numerous classes of Starfleet ships as well as Klingon vessels. The Second Fleet fought in the second Battle of Deep Space 9 and destroyed the Dominion shipyards on Toros III in Cardassian space.
The surface of the hull was surrounded by navigational deflector panels, with numerous type-10 phaser emitters and two photon torpedo launchers. Its compact dimensions meant it provided less of a target, particularly in profile, while it was still capable of a top speed of warp 9.7, ensuring it could respond quickly to emergency situations.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION
The Saber class was first seen in 2371 when two of these starships were in drydock at the Utopia Planitia Fleet Yards in orbit of Mars, while the U.S.S. Voyager NCC-74656 was undergoing its final phases of construction. The Saber class was next seen in 2373 during the Borg's second invasion of the Alpha Quadrant. Several Saber-class ships, including the U.S.S. Yeager NCC-61947, made up part of a fleet assembled by Vice Admiral Hayes to intercept a Borg cube at Sector 001.

Later the same year, a number of Saber-class vessels were assigned to the Second Fleet, an alliance of Federation, Klingon and later Romulan ships that fought in several crucial engagements during the Dominion War.

Saber-class ships were often used to flank larger starships, helping to draw fire and protect them as they attempted to punch through enemy lines. Some of the conflicts they were involved in included the second Battle of Deep Space 9, the raid on the Dominion's shipyards on Torros III, Operation Return and the First Battle of Chi'Yok'a - the first Federation Alliance offensive into Cardassian territory.

In 2378, Saber-class ships were among the fleet that was hastily assembled by Admiral Paris during the Dominion War. These vessels were part of the task force that engaged the Borg cube at the Battle of Wolf 359, when a Borg sphere emerged from the conduit only for the Starfleet armada to be seen taking heavy losses as the cube from all sides. The Borg were only stopped when Captain Picard coordinated the fleet's attack on a vulnerable area of the cube.
The Saber-class U.S.S. Yeager NCC-61947 was named in honor of Chuck Yeager, the US test pilot who was the first man confirmed to have broken the sound barrier on October 14, 1947 in the Bell X-1.

Some of the conflicts that Saber-class ships were involved in during the Dominion War included the Battle of Torros III, the Battle of the Tyra System, Operation Return, the Battle of Chin’toka and the Battle of Cardassia.

According to the ‘STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE Technical Manual,’ the production base for Saber-class starships was the Advanced Starship Design Bureau Integration Section, Spacedock 1, Earth.

The Utopia Planitia Fleet Yards in orbit of Mars featured mushroom-shaped spacedocks and dozens of cage-like drydocks, which encased starships while they were being built.

A human settlement known as the Utopia colony was established on Mars at least as early as 2155. Tom Paris’ idea of a perfect date was to visit the hills overlooking the Utopia Planitia plains in a 1957 Chevy. The Doctor took his advice and programmed the scenario into the U.S.S. Voyager NCC-74656’s holodeck for his date with Denara Pel.
Alex Jaeger initially came up with about a dozen new Starfleet ship designs for the opening battle sequence in STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT. These concepts were slowly whittled down as the producers chose their favorite four designs, which were named the Akira, the Steamrunner, the Norway and the Saber.

“The goal with all of these ships was to make them look completely different from the Enterprise,” said Jaeger. “We were introducing the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-E in that film and the producers didn’t want people going, ‘Wait, which one’s the Enterprise?’”

“The Saber was probably the most used and easily identifiable ship of the four,” continued Jaeger. “It was designed as a smaller ship and supposed to be about the size of the Enterprise’s saucer. It was based on the idea of compacting an existing formation and getting rid of all the struts, necks and fins. The nacelles trailed off the edges of the saucer so that they could be put at the outermost edges of the ship without using struts. The secondary hull was then merged with the saucer to form this tight, but study-looking craft. This ship had a shuttlebay in the notch at the front of the saucer, while the impulse engines were at the aft of the saucer. The deflector dish was in its usual place, as were the phaser strips. I chose to use textures from the Reliant and Defiant models for this ship, giving it an older appearance as if it had been around for a while.”

ALTERNATE DESIGN

Jaeger also designed another ship that was called the U.S.S. Yeager NCC-61947. It was named for Chuck Yeager and the year he broke the sound barrier – 1947.

“The Yeager was a ship designed to separate in time of battle,” said Jaeger. “It had a sort of compact U.S.S. Grissom formation with the saucer and hull as two visibly separate pieces. The neat thing with the Yeager was the profile of the battle section. Even though it looked like the nacelles were attached to the saucer, they were in fact attached via struts from the secondary hull and the saucer merely rested on top of them.”

This design was dropped at the last minute because it was considered too similar to the Saber class, but the ‘Yeager’ name was kept and used on one of the Saber-class ships in the film.

The design was built as a CG model, but only at a very low resolution as there was not the time to create a detailed high-resolution version. A year later, the producers of STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE wanted to use the CG Saber-class model in the show, but due to software differences it had to be largely rebuilt. This gave the CG modelers the opportunity to create a higher resolution model of the Saber-class, and it first appeared in the episode ‘Call to Arms.’
It’s certainly the most memorable shot in STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT: maybe in the entire history of STAR TREK. The Borg Queen’s head floats down from the shadows, supported by two cables, before dropping into her waiting body. Clamps extend from her cybernetic chest and latch around her shoulders, pulling everything together. Finally, she sighs, relishing the sensation of physicality.

Once you’ve seen the movie, it’s difficult to imagine it happening any other way, but when Ronald D. Moore and Brannon Braga wrote FIRST CONTACT, they had no idea how impressive the scene would be. In fact, in early versions of the script, the Queen’s body didn’t snap together. Instead, she floated above Data, suspended by dozens of cables.

The job of translating this image to the screen was given to Herman Zimmerman’s art department. One of the first people Zimmerman asked to look at the effect (and the Queen herself) was illustrator Ricardo Delgado. The idea that the Borg were a unified people with a single, female leader made him think of the ancient Egyptians, and his drawings of the Borg Queen were a combination of the Egyptian ruler Nefertiti and the bride of Frankenstein from the Universal horror movie of the same name.

The final sequence of the Borg Queen’s dramatic entrance in STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT was arrived at after dozens of illustrations from three different concept artists. Even then, the visual effects team had to work out how the concept could be turned into reality when filming the sequence.

A memory from Delgado’s childhood of a grasshopper leg inspired several concepts involving an insect-like appendage attached to the Borg Queen.
legs. In one remarkable concept, the Queen would have scuttled down the wall on spider’s legs before exchanging them for their human counterparts. In others, she was brought down from the ceiling by an enormous, organic throne or on a caterpillar-like appendage.

DIFFERENT BODIES
Delgado also produced drawings without an assembly sequence, showing different ways the Queen’s body could float, as described in the script. Some of these drawings showed her with a sickle or a large sphere instead of legs. In Delgado’s favorite drawing, the Queen looked like a malevolent champagne glass with a sharp metallic spike in place of her legs. "Eventually, the producers decided that the Queen’s body would be assembled, but not in the way Delgado had suggested. Instead of her torso snapping into her legs, her head and shoulders would be lowered into a waiting body.

Delgado had other commitments that restricted the amount of time he could devote to FIRST CONTACT, so the next pass at the assembly sequence was taken by a different illustrator – John Eaves. His very mechanical drawings provided a stark contrast to Delgado’s organic approach. “I did a drawing of this gal with a body and this heavily tubed rig with a head floating down,” said Eaves. “It was made up of two rings that fit inside each other. There was a little zig-zag split in the middle: when her head and body came together, those two rings would have opened up and she’d have stepped out. That one was really fun; Herman [Zimmerman] liked it, but it was too heavy and, at that time, they weren’t sure how they were going to do the effect. They told me to tone it down and get rid of the framework. I did another drawing that was a little bit more what they were looking for; it had four real heavy cables.”

NEW APPROACH
As much as the producers were impressed with what they’d seen, they still didn’t feel they’d found their effect or the look of the Borg Queen, so they brought Industrial Light & Magic’s Alex Jaeger into the loop.

"They opened it up and asked me if I had any suggestions,” said Jaeger. “I came up with a few, in one of which she’d got the sort of mechanical stuff coming off the back of her head. I imagined her having a seductive face and lots of cables attached to her,” said Jaeger. “Actually, in the original design you saw the cables come down first and then she was sort of brought down by the cables. As we got into it and realized that all those cables were going to cost a lot of money, we decided to pare it down to just three that held her up, and that stayed pretty true from then on.

DIFFICULT PROCESS
At the same time, Jaeger and the team at ILM were working out exactly how they would shoot such a demanding effect. As he explained, the shot had several requirements. “She’d be talking while she was coming down, then she connected to her body and then she walked away – all in the same shot!” In the end, the solution actually came from Borg design supervisor Todd Masters...
after a meeting where the assembly sequence was being discussed. Everyone imagined that the sequence would be carried out digitally by ILM, but Masters said he saw another way of going about it. “To me, it sounded like it was a prosthetic effect with some digital sweetening,” said Masters, “so we started talking early on to the producers about that. ILM had another process that they were going to try; they proposed shooting her separately on bluescreen and compositing the head onto a digital body. ILM’s an amazing company, so I’m sure they would have done an amazing job, but my problem with digital effects, sometimes, is it’s easy to see how it’s been done. This was the opening, the introduction of the Queen, and we really thought it needed to be kind of magical. The way she came down shouldn’t look like an effect. We didn’t want people saying ‘Oh, I see a couple of pixels out of whack.’”

PERFORMANCE

There was another disadvantage to ILM’s approach; Alice Krige (who played the Borg Queen) would have to film her entrance weeks, even months, after the rest of the scene, so inevitably the final result wouldn’t play as well as if she and Brent Spiner [Data] were on the stage together. Masters’ solution overcame all of these problems. “Our version was essentially putting Alice on a slant board with her head craned back, resting on the prosthetic neck and shoulders and a lower spine portion,” said Masters. “We would digitally remove the rest of her body [which was wrapped in a blue cloth to make this possible]. It was kind of a crazy idea. Everybody just looked at me and said, ‘Oh, I see a couple of pixels out of whack.’”

ILM embraced this approach, because, as Jaeger explained, they could see the huge advantages of it being more seamless. “This way it was the actress’s real face the whole way down,” said Jaeger. “Then, once she got into her body, we could transition to her actually in the makeup and the suit, and we could have her walk away and continue her dialogue.” Masters remembered that the test was only finished a few days before the actual scene was shot, and that, to his relief, everything worked perfectly. “Everybody loved it,” said Masters. “They thought it was fantastic. The great thing about doing it that way was that Alice was really giving a great performance in the sequence. I really wanted her and Brent to have a real connection in their performances. If you did it the other way, you wouldn’t have the same connection; it wouldn’t have felt as much like it was in the scene.”

The final part of the effect showed the latches on the Queen’s ‘costume’ grabbing her skin. Jaeger said that Everton had designed the hooks, but ILM had to work out how they would move. “We animated them so that they came up and grabbed the skin, and pulled her down so she’s locked into the body,” said Jaeger. “The skin was done with a little 3D; they had a computer-generated patch with the skin texture applied to it. They animated a little buckle and pulled it down so that when we brought the hooks down you could see the skin stretch.”

TEAM EFFORT

Then, with the shot complete, they cut away to the normal footage of the Queen as she walked toward Data. The shot lasted approximately 25 seconds, but there’s no question it was worth it. And everyone from Ricardo Delgado, who first suggested having the Queen’s body snap together, to the animator who stretched the CG skin, was incredibly proud of the result, which set the standard for every STAR TREK movie to come.
ON SCREEN

TRIVIA
Visual effects company Industrial Light & Magic, which carried out most of the special effects work on the Star Wars films, were hired to produce the huge CGI sequence featuring the Battle of Sector 001 at the beginning of STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT. As an in-joke, visual effects supervisor John Knoll inserted a small CGI model of the Millennium Falcon from Star Wars into the battle. It can just about be made out in the picture below where it is located below the left warp nacelle of the Akira-class ship, heading across the front of the Borg cube.

KEY APPEARANCES

STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT
A Borg cube is detected entering Federation space six years after their last incursion when Captain Picard was captured and temporarily assimilated. This time Starfleet are prepared and launch a defensive fleet to intercept it. Around 30 ships, including Saber-class vessels, attack the cube, but are unable to stop it as it heads towards Earth. The U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-E enters the fray, and the fleet eventually destroys the cube, just as it launches a spherical craft from its interior. It forms a temporal vortex and travels back in time, forcing Picard and his crew to follow them to preserve the past and save the future.

STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE
‘Tears of the Prophets’
Captain Sisko is ordered to plan an invasion into Cardassian space. The Bajoran Prophets later appear to Sisko and warn him not to leave the station. Sisko nevertheless leads an Allied fleet in an attack on the Chin’toka system. This area of Cardassian space turns out to be protected by orbital weapon platforms that inflict huge losses on the Allied fleet before they manage to deactivate them. The Allies eventually win control of the system, but back on Deep Space 9 a Pah-wraith possessed Dukat mortally wounds Jadzia Dax and closes the Bajoran wormhole.

FIRST APPEARANCE
STAR TREK: FIRST CONTACT
TV APPEARANCES
STAR TREK DEEP SPACE NINE
DESIGNED BY
Alex Jaeger

The Cardassian orbital weapon platforms seen in the STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE episode ‘Tears of the Prophets’ were rendered as CGI models based on John Eaves’ design illustration of them seen below.

The Battle of Sector 001 featured approximately 30 Starfleet ships. These included at least five Saber-class ships, five Steamrunner-class ships, three Oberth-class ships, two Akira-class ships, two Norway-class ships, two Miranda-class ships and one Nebula-class ship.

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