U.S.S. EXCELSIOR
NCC-2000

CLASS: EXCELSIOR
ACTIVE: 2290S-2370S
TEST RUNS AS: NX-2000
LENGTH: 467 METERS
Contents

04: U.S.S. EXCELSIOR NCC-2000

08: DESIGNING THE SHIP

18: THE OTHER EXCELSIORS

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# U.S.S. EXCELSIOR NCC-2000

**SPECIFICATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REGISTRY:</th>
<th>NCC-2000</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLASS:</td>
<td>EXCELSIOR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEAPONRY:</td>
<td>TYPE-8 PHASER ARRAYS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 PHOTON TORPEDO LAUNCHERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPTAIN:</td>
<td>HIKARU SULU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![U.S.S. EXCELSIOR NCC-2000 Image](image-url)
The U.S.S. Excelsior established a starship class that had a long life and was still in service in the late 24th century.
Hikaru Sulu was the captain of the U.S.S. Excelsior NCC-2000 when it was the first Federation vessel to detect the destruction of the Klingon moon of Praxis. Sulu later took the Excelsior to the aid of his former commander, Captain Kirk, at the Klingon/Federation peace conference at Camp Khitomer.
The first of its starship class, the Excelsior began life as a prototype vessel with the registry NX-2000. Far larger than the Constitution-class vessels (such as the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701) it was designed to replace, the class was also intended to be much faster, thanks to a new form of propulsion, the transwarp drive.

However, after extensive tests on the NX-2000, the new technology failed to live up to expectations, and the Excelsior entered full active service by 2290 with standard warp drive and the registry NCC-2000.

Many more Excelsior-class ships were commissioned in the years that followed, including a variant design with a larger engineering hull and additional impulse engines. Though later than scheduled, the vessels did replace Constitution-class ships as Starfleet’s primary deep-space explorers, and many were still in service at the end of the Dominion War in 2375.
A captain named Styles was in command of the Excelsior when it was still a prototype. His chief of engineering was briefly Montgomery Scott from the decommissioned Enterprise. Scotty used the position to sabotage his new ship, in order to help his former captain, Admiral James T. Kirk, steal the Enterprise and save the katra of their fallen comrade, Spock.

The Excelsior's first long-term assignment under Captain Sulu was a three-year mission from 2290, investigating gaseous planetary anomalies in the Beta Quadrant.

Sulu's bridge crew on the Excelsior included Lieutenant Janice Rand, (left) with whom he served on the Enterprise, and Ensign Tuvok, a Vulcan who would later serve on the U.S.S. Voyager NCC-74656.

▲ Communications officer Lieutenant Junior Grade Janice Rand on board the Excelsior in 2293.
By the time Harve Bennett wrote STAR TREK III: THE SEARCH FOR SPOCK in 1983, the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701 had become a classic design. What seemed far-out in 1966 was now reassuringly familiar, and though it had stood the test of time thanks to a ‘refit’ for STAR TREK: THE MOTION PICTURE, it was time for something new.

In story terms, the Enterprise had been in service for decades, and was badly damaged during the events of STAR TREK II: THE WRATH OF KHAN. So it made sense that Starfleet would seek to replace the ship with something more advanced.

Enter the U.S.S. Excelsior NX-2000 – described in Bennett’s script as being similar to the Enterprise, but “a super starship... bigger, sleeker... the new Queen of Space.” On its first appearance, it elicits a mix of awe and foreboding from the Enterprise crew, and it needed to have the same effect on a cinema audience.

Realizing the ship on screen was the responsibility of visual effects maestros Industrial Light & Magic (ILM), who worked closely alongside Bennett – in his role as producer – and director Leonard Nimoy from the earliest stages of pre-production.
Some elements of this powerful, angular design foreshadow the look of the Dreadnought-class U.S.S. Vengeance in STAR TREK INTO DARKNESS (2013).

This concept image shows an Excelsior with four pylons coming off the saucer section: two supporting warp engines and two linking to a flat, wide, secondary hull. The Spacedock interior backdrop indicates that this is not (as sometimes claimed) a concept for the Valiant/Griscom.
As Rodis-Jamero’s designs moved in an increasingly flattened, linear direction, they retained some of the muscular menace that went on to define one of his other designs for the film – the Klingon bird-of-prey.

The first concept drawings of the Excelsior were made by ILM’s Nilo Rodis-Jamero in February 1983. Today, much of his original artwork is believed lost, but photocopies survive and are reproduced in these pages. After experimenting with designs that combined an Enterprise-style saucer with more compact warp nacelles and a smaller, canoe-shaped secondary hull, Rodis-Jamero moved on to more linear designs with chunkier, somewhat frisbee-like saucer sections. He then passed these designs on to ILM modelmaker Bill George, who interpreted the sketches to make small study models that could be easily handled and assessed from all angles at meetings.

“The most important thing was that the ships looked like part of a family,” Rodis-Jamero said. “I didn’t want to go leaping far into the future, I just wanted a newer model (than the Enterprise). It still had to be designed and manufactured by the same people using the same tools.”
Bill George’s study model develops on Rodis-Jamero’s sketches (top) to create an Excelsior that looks more futuristic than the Enterprise, but which does not necessarily seem more powerful. The 21-inch model was sold at auction in 2011 with only two of its original four nacelles still in place.
As George set about building the study models, the _Excelsior_ became even flatter and sleeker than in Rodis-Jamero’s initial drawings. With some of his early ideas now feeding into the design of the film’s other new starship – the far less imposing _U.S.S. Grissom_ – a ‘stretch limo’ look for the larger ship became the dominant direction.

“The design impetus with the _Grissom_ was that it shouldn’t steal any thunder from the _Enterprise_,” said Rodis-Jamero. “The _Excelsior_ was there to do that. I don’t need you to remember the _Grissom_ – because we’re going to blow it apart anyway – but the _Excelsior_ had to be so massive and brilliant that it would age _Enterprise_ when you saw it.”

**EXPLORING AND EXPERIMENTING**

As well as making the _Excelsior_ bigger than the _Enterprise_, in some of his drawings, Rodis-Jamero gave it two extra warp nacelles to suggest it was twice as powerful as the older ship. George also refined these elements, making them rounder at the front while tapering them at the back. And where Rodis-Jamero’s drawings largely focused on a sense of added strength and battleship-style...
bulk, George’s models added a degree of grace that was more in keeping with Starfleet’s mission of peaceful exploration and diplomacy.

One of the most interesting study models made by George at this time bears the registry NCC-0220. Measuring 23 inches from end to end, it has four warp nacelles on adjustable pylons that can be positioned in an open ‘X’ formation or in a tighter grouping of two pairs on either side of the ship. It is a movement familiar from Star Wars’ X-wing fighters, first seen in 1977, and not dissimilar from the variable wing positions of the Klingon bird-of-prey, which also debuted in STAR TREK III with a design by George and Rodis-Jamero. However, while Rodis-Jamero has cited the X-wing fighter as an influence on his work, it is unclear whether he and George ever intended the Excelsior to have a variable profile on screen. None of Rodis-Jamero’s surviving sketches indicate any moving parts, and it is entirely possible that George built his model with adjustable sections purely as an easy way to show two different design options without having to construct a whole extra ship. Today, the model is in the safe hands of STAR TREK scenic artist and technical consultant Mike Okuda, its nacelles seemingly long since glued into a permanently ‘open’ position.

**EXCEEDING EXPECTATIONS**

Whatever the reasoning behind the adjustable four-nacelle study, it was indicative of George’s ability to create and adapt multipurpose models quickly and efficiently — often in just a few hours. And when he was left with time to spare before Bennett and Nimoy were due to visit ILM’s model shop and choose a final design for the Excelsior, he was invited by VFX art director David Carson to submit his own ideas for the ship.

“Dave said, ‘You’ve got a couple of days, go ahead.’” George later recalled. “So I thought: OK, what would the Enterprise look like if the Japanese designed it? At the time I was really into Japanese design, so that was the basis for what I came up with.”

George’s concept was far more flowing and familiar-looking than the other, more angular
designs. Its secondary hull greatly exaggerated the scoop beneath the Enterprise’s shuttle bay and retained its curving ‘belly’. However, it also incorporated the flat top from several of Rodis-Jamero’s designs, echoing the lines of a 20th-century aircraft carrier. Its saucer and two warp nacelles were elevated, in the same formation as the Enterprise, and it walked the line between tradition and innovation.

"In the script, it was described as the next generation," George recalled. "It was supposed to look super-fast, and really different from the Enterprise. (The other designs) were very futuristic and did not look like the Enterprise at all. There
The 7.5-foot studio model with its original finishes, barring name and registry decals.

were a couple that I really liked, but I wanted to come up with my own take on it, and it just so happened that mine looked more like the Enterprise than any of the others.”

This familiarity clearly resonated with Nimoy, who selected George’s design from the array of other study models he had built. “I think that is what Leonard responded to,” he reasoned. “We laid out all these things on a table, and he pointed and said ‘That one.’ I wasn’t trying to figure out which one he was going to choose. It was quite a surprise when I found out mine was the one he wanted!”

EXPERTISE X EXPEDIENCY

With the final design agreed, ILM started work on a 7.5-foot studio model. Though the ship was intended to be much bigger than the Enterprise (in the script, Bennett described the difference in terms of World War II aircraft – the 74-foot B-17 Flying Fortress versus the 99-foot B-29 Superfortress), the model was built six inches shorter than the refit Enterprise first seen in THE MOTION PICTURE. This decision was made for reasons of budget, speed and maneuverability, plus the fact that the two ships would never be filmed side by side, but rather shot separately and composited to make a single image in post-production.

“We had to build a model that looked as good as – if not better than – Enterprise,” remembered ILM’s Steve Gawley, who oversaw construction. “We had to be innovative, because of a lack of funding, and we had to be quick. That required us to come up with a different way of building, and so we used vacuum-forming to come up with hollow components pretty quickly. The ship had to be hollow so we could have interior lighting.”

That interior lighting was also designed to be far less complex than the internal workings of the Enterprise model (which was not made by ILM), meaning that all aspects of filming the completed model were more straightforward than working with the larger, older ship. It was hardly a surprise, therefore, that when STAR TREK III wrapped, the impressive model was carefully stored away and earmarked for future use.

EXTRA EXCURSIONS

After a brief appearance in STAR TREK IV: THE VOYAGE HOME (1986), the Excelsior model was pressed into service once more when ILM was commissioned to provide the visual effects for “Encounter At Farpoint”, the 1987 launch episode of STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION. As the man...
most familiar with the model, Gawley set about sprucing up the four-year-old ship, and turning it into the U.S.S. Hood NCC-2541. A small library of shots was made, allowing for the appearance of various Excelsior-class vessels throughout the run of THE NEXT GENERATION, and this footage was later used to represent the U.S.S. Fearless, the U.S.S. Cairo, and the U.S.S. Gorkon among others. In fact, the only time this footage was not used to represent an Excelsior-class ship in THE NEXT GENERATION was for a single shot in the episode “The Child”, for which the model was partially relabeled as the U.S.S. Repulse.

Then, in 1991, ILM fully refurbished the model to serve as the U.S.S. Excelsior one last time, now with the registry NCC-2000, in STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY (stock footage from STAR TREK IV was used for STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER). The large silver bridge module was replaced with a smaller one, more in keeping with the scale of the bridge interior seen in the film; the impulse engines were modified; and
Captain Sulu’s U.S.S. Excelsior NCC-2000 in its only big-screen outing, 1991’s STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY.

The Excelsior model relabeled as the U.S.S. Hood for STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION.

The model renamed once more to become the U.S.S. Melbourne in DEEP SPACE NINE.

The modified ship with additional impulse engines, nacelle cap fins, and U.S.S. Lakota markings, on display before being sold at auction in 2006.

the dome-shaped lounge in front of the rear shuttle bay was replaced with a more angular structure. One year later, the Excelsior decals came off for the last time, when the ship was relabeled the U.S.S. Melbourne NCC-62043 for ‘Emissary’ – the debut episode of STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE.

EXTENSIONS AND EXIT
The model underwent its most extensive overhaul in 1994, when it was upgraded to become the U.S.S. Enterprise NCC-1701-B for the movie STAR TREK GENERATIONS. Though this was an Excelsior-class vessel, it needed to be clear to audiences that it was not the same ship from earlier films. For plot purposes, it also needed a projecting area that could be badly damaged without effecting the rest of the ship. With those requirements in mind, illustrator John Eaves updated the look on paper, before ILM applied the changes to the aging model. The top of the saucer was entirely rebuilt, gaining two extra impulse engines in the process, and the underside of the secondary hull was more obviously remodeled with fiberglass resin ‘wings’ on either side.

After GENERATIONS, the amended model made only one further on-screen appearance, as the U.S.S. Lakota NCC-42768 in the DEEP SPACE NINE episode ‘Paradise Lost’ in 1996. After 12 years and 20 appearances, the original Excelsior was retired. Its replacements would be a smaller model, a CGI version, and occasional stock footage.
In 1996, as part of STAR TREK's 30th anniversary celebrations, the STAR TREK: VOYAGER episode 'Flashback' was set partly during the events of STAR TREK VI: THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY (or, at least, within the long-lived Vulcan Tuvok's memory of those events). The episode made use of stock footage of Captain Sulu's U.S.S. Excelsior from the film, but the production team also hoped to film new effects shots using the Excelsior model. When it became clear that this would not be possible, owing to the permanent nature of the changes made to the ship for STAR TREK GENERATIONS two years earlier, the team decided to commission a whole new studio model.

Built at a more manageable (and cheaper) 36-inch scale, compared to the original 7.5-foot build, the new model would prove to be the last on-screen STAR TREK commission built by Gregory Jein, Inc., a model shop that had worked on the franchise since the 1970s. In the finished episode, the smaller ship was all but indistinguishable from the stock shots of the original – with the notable exception that the new Excelsior had glowing warp nacelles (something never seen in the Kirk-era films).

The convenient size of the Jein model also meant that it was far more suitable for use than the updated original model when Excelsior-
class ships were called for on *DEEP SPACE NINE*. Its appearances there include the episodes “For The Uniform” as the U.S.S. Mallinche, and “A Time To Stand”, for which it was partially relabeled and battle-scarred to serve as the U.S.S. Fredrickson.

After “A Time To Stand” the model was redressed as the undamaged U.S.S. Excelsior NCC-2000 and used as a display piece at exhibitions. It also formed the basis of a computer-generated *Excelsior*-class ship built by David Lombardi of VFX house Digital Muse in 1997. This CG model made the first of many *DEEP SPACE NINE* appearances in “Favor The Bold”, and can also be glimpsed as the dry-docked U.S.S. Fredrickson in *VOYAGER*’s “Relativity”.

Above left: The 36-inch *Excelsior* model as seen in *VOYAGER*’s “Flashback”. Above right: The same model redecorated to become the Fredrickson in *DEEP SPACE 9*’s “A Time To Stand”.

Above: Several *Excelsior*-class ships form part of the CG armada seen in *DEEP SPACE 9*’s “Favor The Bold”.

▲ Inside the lightweight metal frame of the Jein *Excelsior* is a mass of fiber optic cabling.

▲ A closer look at the bridge module and surrounding details on the 36-inch model.