One small step

by Jetro de Château

It is 1979 and I have arrived on the moon. In the flat area between two craters, I drive my 886 Space Buggy towards the Mobile Rocket 897 Launcher that I will use to put a small satellite into orbit. It was the golden age of Space Classic and I spent endless hours exploring this marvellous world from a corner of our living room.

Fast forward 40 years and we arrive in 2019. LEGO includes a new Space theme in City. This time the astronauts aim at Mars, and LEGO is working together with NASA to bring authenticity to their sets. A lot has happened in 40 years. LEGO has grown–I have grown–and comparing sets from such vastly different eras can hardly be fair. Or can it? I had a good look at the catalogue of Classic Space sets, trying to identify which set or sets would come close to the experience of the second largest set in this "new" Space theme. Nostalgia may have played an important part, but I wanted to offset my experience with Classic Space that of my kids reacting to modern City Space sets. How did that go? First, let me introduce the contending sets.

As is the case for many LEGO fans, there was a time–from late adolescence to my early thirties–that I almost forgot about LEGO. I say almost, because occasionally I would still think fondly of my old LEGO sets when I saw some new set in a shop window. But there was never anything to rekindle the flame. Until. . . Oddly enough (or maybe it is not odd at all) it was MINDSTORMS that brought me out of that lethargic state, and for some time I was entirely focused on robotics as well as technic sets. "Traditional" LEGO didn't really appeal to me until I rediscovered Castle. That theme went extinct, again, and there was never anything that rekindled my love for Space to the point of wanting to do something with it. That is until I saw the new wave of Space related sets. And it wasn't even City Space that rekindled that interest. It was LEGO Ideas. The NASA Apollo 21309 Saturn V (https://www.hispabrickmagazine.com/blog-en/blog-en.php?id=2305), in 2017, really got me dreaming of Space again. That set wasn't just fun to build, it was also a great educational tool, and since I worked in a primary school at the time I made good use of the resource. When the 10266 Lunar Lander (https://www.hispabrickmagazine.com/blog-en/blog-en.php?id=7466) came out in 2019, I added that to my curriculum, too. However, neither set is really a play set and it is one thing to use it as a teaching tool and quite another to build a story around them.

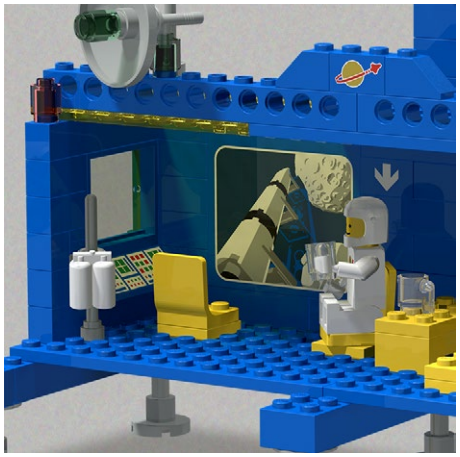
That same year the (renewed) Space team was introduced in City, and with my newly rekindled love for Space sets, I knew I just had to get these sets. Back in the early 80s, I mostly had small sets that I combined to create one large story. This time I also started with the smaller sets, and it wasn't until a couple of weeks ago that I finally got my hands on the second largest set in this series, the Deep Space Rocket and Launch Control (#60228). As I mentioned at the start of this article, comparing a modern Space set to a Classic Space set is not really fair. For one thing, the sentimental value of a Classic Space set will always far outweigh that of a modern City Space set. At the same time, modern sets are generally so much bigger and there are many new elements and techniques that were not used back in the day.

And what set to compare it to? Looking at the elements in the 60228 Deep Space Rocket and Launch Control, there is a control centre, a rocket or space ship, a support vehicle and a railway to bring the astronauts from launch control to their spacecraft. None of the Classic Space sets have this exact same scheme, but I felt 6970 Beta I Command Base came closest. The set has a mission control, a manned spaceship, a small vehicle and a kind of monorail that goes from the command centre to the launch site.

Let's start out by comparing some numbers.

Set number	**6970**	**60228**
Year	1980	2019
Parts	264	837
Minifigs	4	6
HxWxD cm	20 x 25.5 x 51	42 x 36 x 47

It doesn't take a genius to see that the 1980 set is considerably smaller, but let's forget about size for now and focus on the elements, starting with mission control. What makes the Beta I Command Base mission control stand out in my opinion is the array of communication services on the roof, including one large and two smaller satellite dishes. However, the actual control area is quite sparse and much of the interior is taken up by a lounge. I always wondered how the astronauts were supposed to sip their drinks in an open



6970 command centre

60228 launch control

60228 with phone used for control screen

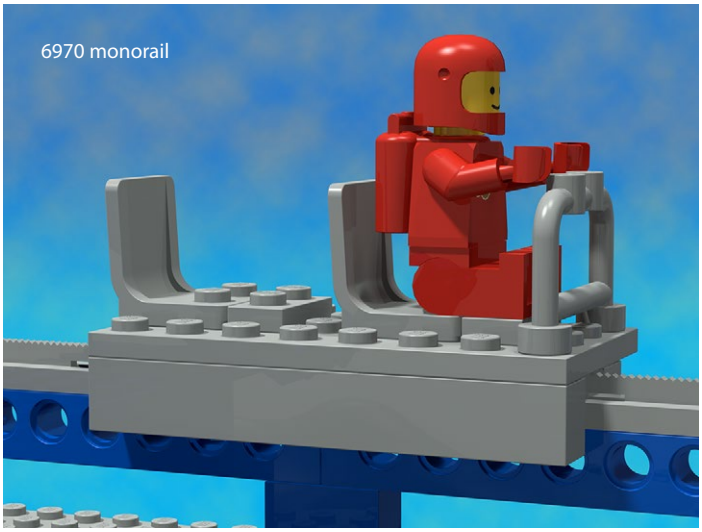
command centre, although given the fact that there are poles to hang up their oxygen bottles I suppose we were meant to think this area is actually closed off. The large screen displaying the take-off of a rocket (where is that rocket, because the set doesn't include it?) is a printed 1 x 6 x 5 brick.

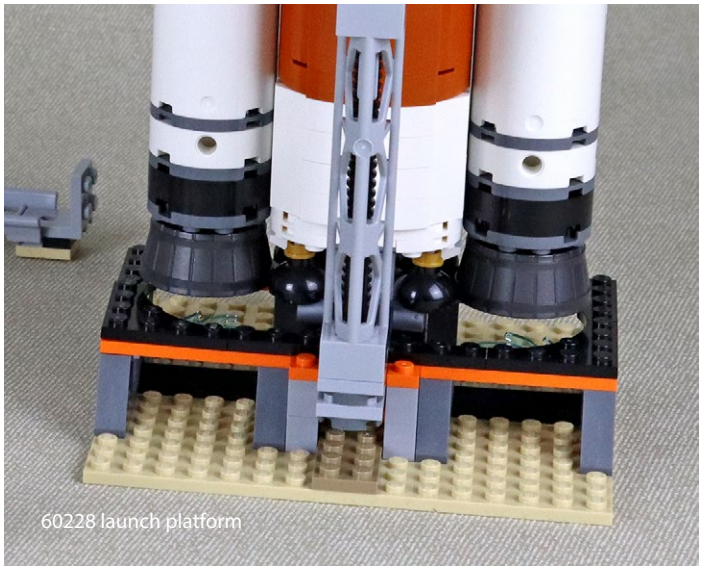
Compare that to the Launch Control in 60228 and there are a number of important differences. The main one is probably the fact that this Launch Control is not meant to be on the Moon or on Mars, but rather on Earth. This is a significant departure from the original Space theme, which took place entirely on or around the moon. The use of large transparent panels also enhances the experience for this set, without compromising accessibility. There are two ways you can access the interior of the new Launch Control: you can remove the large glass panel on the front or you can open up the whole construction as it is built with hinges. Stickers also play a significant role in the large screen and this time transparency plays a starring role. On each of the two displays, parts of the stickers are transparent. On the right side, this adds motion. Another small sticker is placed on a wheel behind the main screen. You can turn it from behind the display and make it look as if a satellite is revolving around the earth. On the other side, the numbers 0 to 3 are transparent. A nifty mechanism allows you to create a short countdown for launch. By sliding a white panel behind the transparent numbers these light up in sequence.

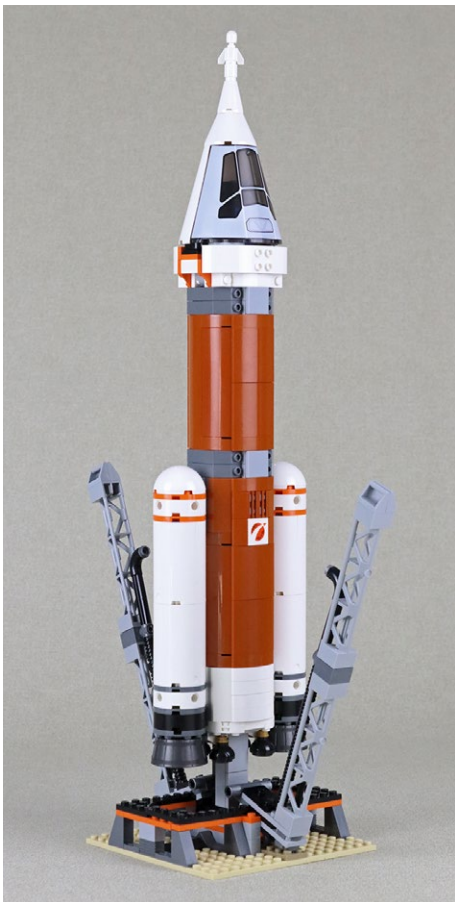
Alternatively, you can use the LEGO City Explorers app on your phone to provide an alternative control screen. Unfortunately, this app does not take into account the screen size of your device. In my case that means that a significant portion of the control screen doesn't fit inside the room.

The second element both sets have is the transportation system. Although it is the last thing you build in the modern City set, it makes sense to discuss it next. The 1980 set uses three straight 16L rails to create a kind of straight monorail. The system works well without using any special elements. The 2019 set uses the roller coaster track that was first introduced in 2017. This, of course, relies on using the specific roller coaster car, this time in blue. The train is a lot of fun. There is a simple push mechanism at the top to set it in motion and there are two stops on the track. The first is an orange safety barrier at a stop marked "testing facility". The second is at the end of the line, marked "launch pad".

One of the strengths of the Classic Space era were the baseplates. 6970 includes two raised baseplates with craters. I still have a pair of these although the corners are quite a bit the worse for wear. These baseplates, and the road plates with yellow markings from the same time, were the basis for most of my space adventures back then. Times have changed and baseplates are no longer an integral part of sets (except for a very limited number







of sets). 60228 has freestanding elements, but sometimes you need a base to anchor things to. In 6970 that was the base for the spaceship. A simple platform made with bricks and a plate, as well as a hinge element to put the spaceship at an angle. In 60228 not only is the spaceship (in this case a rocket) a lot bigger, the launch site is also a lot more complex, and playable!

Curiously, the launch tower is referenced in 6970 in that large printed brick. The sight of the launch tower retreating from a rocket is an integral part of the expectation of a realistic launch, and the launch pad In 60228 provides just that experience. The rocket sits on a solid base that provides the ignition flames and two towers to keep the rocket in place. As soon as it takes off, the rocket no longer holds the towers in place and they pivot sideways. It is a great launch experience!

The rocket is quite a bit more complex than the spaceship in the 1980 set. That spaceship was little more than a pair of rockets strapped to some wings, all of which was controlled by a simple steering wheel. The rocket in 60228 also has a pair of boosters, two rockets to the sides, connected with pins, ready to fall off once the rocket gains enough altitude. The main body of the rocket consists of two large container elements. While both can open, the bottom element—which presumably contains rocket fuel–is unused. The top elements serves to house a satellite, the payload of this mission. There are a number of satellites in the City Space theme, and this one is unique in that at its core there is a magnifying glass, making the satellite look like some sort of telescope. The capsule at the top of the rocket is big enough to hold two astronauts and, rather than a steering wheel, contains two control panels, one on either side.

Although 60228 is set on Earth and not on the Moon or Mars there is still a little test scene. It consists of a 6 x 6 area that contains two geodes (or one, in two parts). There is also a 2 x 2 tile, which takes a sticker to simulate a kind of geode pattern in a flat surface. Since there are lines in different colours I first though the transparent red book cover with display pattern that doubles as a futuristic smart device would serve to highlight

certain lines and allow you to discover a secret message or code. Believe me I tried, but I haven't found anything. It is a bit of a missed opportunity as that wold have made a great extra to the set at no additional cost.

Around this test site (?), there are two other additions. One is a small helper robot on four swivel wheels that is clearly from the same family as the other helper bots that appear in the theme: all of them share the same face and arms. The second element is a larger vehicle also on swivel wheels. It comes with a gripper on an articulated arm that can pick up the geodes, as well as a driver seat with modern controls. I would expect to see this vehicle on a Moon or Mars base, but I suppose it needs to be tested on Earth first. It is too large to fit in the cargo hold of the rocket, so we'll have to find some other way of taking it with us when we embark on our mission to Mars. By comparison, the buggy that came with 6970 was much simpler. It made me think of the Moon Rover though and felt like the perfect complement in the environment of the base.

The 60228 Deep Space Launch Control set comes with six minifigures and there is total parity: three are female and three are male. Only two of the minifigs are astronauts and all the others are ground personnel. There are two launch control techs, a female scientist and a male operator. In contrast, 6970 came with four minifigs all of undetermined gender. Two yellow and two red space suits, for you to decide who was who and what were their responsibilities. I do enjoy the much more realistic and detailed printing and characterisation of the modern minifigs, but sometimes I miss the simple times when a minifigs was just a placeholder for your imagination.

My only gripe with 60228 is that the cones of the two booster rockets are very loose. Anything less than very careful play and those comes will come off. I haven't found a solution to that problem either–short of using some chewing gum that is. Overall, I found both the building process and the playability of the set to be thoroughly enjoyable. My kids also enjoyed the set–that is the primary target for these sets anyway–and together we had a bunch of space adventures. The integration with the app didn't really work for us as I explained above, although the additional footage in the app is a great way to learn a little more about modern Space travel. Modern Space will never have the same nostalgic association for me as Classic Space has but maybe it will be nostalgic for my kids when they get older. As it stands, this set and the rest of the sets in the City Space theme will likely make a reappearance in our LEGO sessions, and we may even consider adding a spaceport to our LEGO City layout.

We wish to thank LEGO for providing this set for review. The opinions in this review are not supported or endorsed by LEGO.

For reviews of other City Space sets from 2019, visit our blog https://www.hispabrickmagazine.com/blog-en/