



## DVD: *Apollo 13 - Houston We've Had a Problem* (2004)

**Review Rating:** Very Good

**Label/Studio:** Classic Home Entertainment / MVD Visual

**Catalog #:** DVD-5019X

**Region:** 1 (NTSC)

**Released:** April 26, 2005

**Genre:** Documentary

**Synopsis:** Documentary of the nail-biting astronaut rescue using nothing but archival stills, film, and audio from the original mission.

**Directed by:** Robert Garofalo

**Edited by:** Michael Dunne

**Music by:** n/a

**Produced by:** Lyn Beardsall

**Cast:** n/a

**Film Length:** 85 mins.

**Colour:**

**Languages:** English Dolby and DTS 5.1, English Dolby Stereo 2.0

**Subtitles:**

**Process/Ratio:** 1.33:1

**Anamorphic DVD:** No

### Special Features :

Interview/speech by Apollo 13 Commander Jim Lovell: "The Odyssey of Apollo 13" (16:11)

### Comments :

Whereas Ron Howard's 1995 film dramatized the harrowing stages of NASA's efforts to bring astronauts Jim Lovell, Fred Haise, and John Swigert back to Earth when an oxygen leak corrupted what was to have been the third lunar moon landing in April of 1970, an episode of Tom Hanks' equally superb 1998 TV production **From the Earth to the Moon** focused on the wives, and how a media bored with space flights suddenly returned with blazing spotlights to exploit the fears of family, friends, and a nation concerned about three men seemingly lost in space.

Aside from a few related documentaries, including Al Reinert's superb **For All Mankind** (1989), PBS's **Apollo 13: To the Edge and Back** (1994), you'd think everything concerning the Apollo 13 mission has been said and dramatized, except during the passing years a lot of rare and quite a bit of previously commercially unused footage has been unearthed – at its most raw, archived on the Fox-distributed set **Apollo 13: The Real Story**, as part of Spacecraft Films' historical space archive series on DVD.

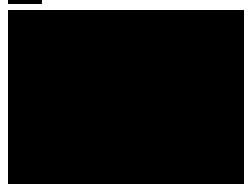
For **Apollo 13 – Houston: We've Had a Problem**, director Robert Garofalo seemingly took the challenge to craft a narrative of the Apollo 13 mission using nothing but the words, stills, and film footage of the astronauts and the massive technical support team responsible for developing and



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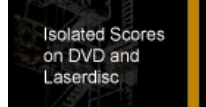


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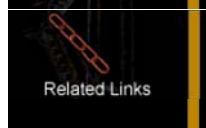


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refining the America space program.

A daunting task for a perfectionist, yet this new documentary also proves how far media saturation and its news gathering technology had progressed since WWII: smaller, lighter TV cameras enabled NASA to see, judge, and communicate with the astronauts; footage was used to double-check dockings and mission minutia for safety; and the faster transmission times enabled both parties to communicate in near-real-time, and exploit a mission as a prime time network event.

Ron Howard's film illustrated how tired the public had become of NASA's long stream of space flights, switching back to regular TV programs in place of humans flying through space, but Garofalo's doc shows how NASA's pioneering use of TV tech quickly became de rigueur on subsequent missions, thereby enabling Garofalo to stitch a gripping narrative, matching footage with archival chatter between the astronauts and the earth-bound technicians.

Just as common today were the filmed and taped post-mission press conferences, which Garofalo intercuts to counterpoint or set up the next set of harrowing events, and more interestingly, the intermittent press conferences which had NASA officials and scientists seen in prior archival footage now facing a hungry media with models to explain what plans they were working on to bring the men home.

It's a significant shift in P.R. policy not because the ongoing danger forced the scientists out from their secluded headquarters, but because people were reminded of something everyone at NASA always knew: space flight and exploration is dangerous stuff.

Throughout the drama, you quickly admire the astronaut's professional calm that kept them focused on finding real solutions to real dramas, and the exchanges between astronauts and technicians are ever-courteous, which seems almost ludicrous to contemporary filmgoers, since fiction filmmakers tend to goose dialogue because audiences would never believe men in dire luck would remain rock steady, and so utterly polite.

The doc reaches a bit of a narrative lull after the first third, but the editing of diverse archival media gives us a near-live window as the lives of three men are ultimately saved by their ingenuity, and the brilliant support of hundreds of technicians who solved problems under the gun. (A great example is the oxygen scrubber, which even the NASA team explains to reporters during a mid-mission briefing. Seen in Howards's film, it's striking to note how events that seemed far-fetched and overly dramatic in **Apollo 13** were rooted in actualities.)

The TV footage, while grainy and full of the flaws typical of early colour tube cameras (ghosting, high contrast issues) also gives us ample views of the tiny spacecraft corners occupied by the men after they moved from their ship into the docked lunar module (named the LEM) and slingshot around the moon to return back to earth's orbit and attempt a re-entry into earth's atmosphere.

Fans of vintage space footage will also love Garofalo's reliance on archival media, including the Apollo 13 space launch, the various stages that ignite and break from the main fuselage as the ship clear's Earth's atmosphere, the ominous footage the men took as they flew around the moon and the massive craters that could've been their final resting place, and their triumphant return to earth.

The DVD transfer is fairly smooth, and doesn't show too much noise reduction for the vintage footage, and the audio mix delivers atmospheric Dolby and DTS 5.1 mixes. Only qualms: Garofalo's re-use of music from his prior documentary, [Apollo 11: The Eagle Has Landed](#), which now feels out of context in this separate production.

As a bonus, the DVD's producers have included a rare public appearance of the three astronauts (likely from the late 1980s), which has team leader Jim Lovell explaining the events of Apollo 13 in a much more affable manor, with some humorous anecdotes. It's a perfect postscript to a doc space fans will want to revisit again, and again.

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