

Olympian Eddie Tolan

Wurtsmith Air Force Base

The Shiawassee Flats

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF MICHIGAN



Michigan History

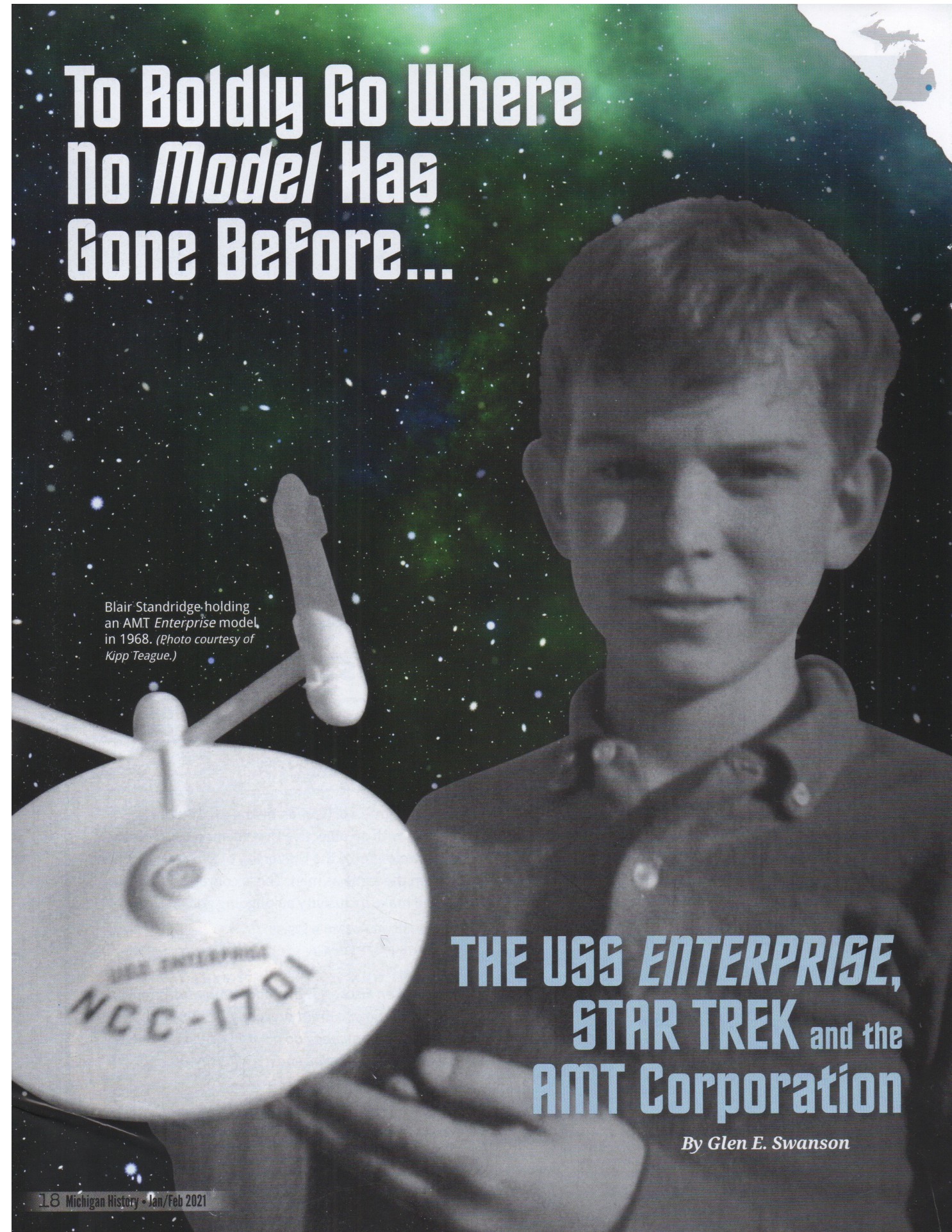
hsmichigan.org | \$6.95 | January/February 2021

To Boldly Go Where No *Model*
Has Gone Before...



THE USS *ENTERPRISE*,
STAR TREK and the
AMT Corporation





To Boldly Go Where
No *Model* Has
Gone Before...

Blair Standridge holding
an AMT *Enterprise* model
in 1968. (Photo courtesy of
Kipp Teague.)

THE USS *ENTERPRISE*,
STAR TREK and the
AMT Corporation

By Glen E. Swanson

Since its inception in 1966, the TV show *Star Trek* has become an iconic part of American culture. Nearly everyone knows about the exploits of the crew members aboard the starship *Enterprise*, but fewer people have heard of the Michigan-based company that produced millions of *Star Trek* model kits in tandem with the show's burgeoning popularity.



“Space...the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship *Enterprise*, its five-year mission... to explore strange new worlds...to seek out new life and new civilizations...to boldly go where no man has gone before.” The introductory monologue of Captain James T. Kirk—played by William Shatner—invited viewers to join the crew of the starship *Enterprise* and watch the brand-new television series *Star Trek*. Every week, households witnessed series creator Gene Roddenberry’s vision of life in the twenty-third century unfold in living color.

Those opening lines of narration, some of the most famous in all of television history, helped launch a very successful line of plastic models. For nearly 40 years since issuing its first kit of the *Enterprise* in 1967, the Troy, Michigan-based AMT Corporation—short for Aluminum Model Toys—produced at least 23 unique *Star Trek* kits. Millions of kits have been sold, making the model company’s license with the television series one of the most successful not only in the history of AMT but also in the history of the *Star Trek* franchise.

Striking a Deal

During its initial three-year run that began on September 8, 1966, *Star Trek* proved to be a moderate success, especially among fans of science fiction. One of those fans was Stephen E. Whitfield. Born Stephen Edward Poe—later taking the name of his stepfather—Whitfield worked for AMT when *Star Trek* first premiered on television. Before the first episode even aired, a deal was brokered between AMT and Desilu Studios, the production company that made *Star Trek*, to acquire the rights to manufacture model kits for the new



Stephen E. Whitfield, who worked for the Phoenix-based advertising agency Roland D. Ptak & Associates, was instrumental in brokering the deal that allowed AMT to acquire the rights to produce the *Star Trek* model kits. (Photo courtesy of the author.)

series. The deal became one of the show’s first official product licenses.

“My first personal contact with *Star Trek* was in August, 1966,” wrote Whitfield in the introduction to his book, *The Making of Star Trek*, which was published in 1968. “At the time I was employed by an advertising agency in Phoenix, Arizona. One of the agency’s accounts was AMT Corporation, a manufacturer of scale model plastic hobby kits. AMT had acquired the merchandising rights on the *U.S.S. Enterprise* and intended to market a scale model plastic kit of the *Star Trek* spaceship. Part of my job became one of working closely with Desilu Studios and NBC-TV in order to generate publicity that would reflect favorably on AMT and, hopefully, future sales of the *Enterprise* model kit.”

AMT had started in 1948 as a side business of West Gallogly Sr., who made preassembled plastic promotional car models for the big three automotive companies in Detroit. The company later expanded to make model kits. The

USS *Enterprise* model kit, however, was AMT's first out-of-this-world experience. Prior to its release, the company had never produced a science-fiction or science-fact model. AMT was the world's largest manufacturer of model cars and trucks—not rockets and starships. So why did the company agree to make a kit that was so beyond anything it had made before?

AMT was also well-established as the producer of “Star Cars”—model kits that featured popular movie and television celebrities. For example, shortly before the release of the *Enterprise* kit, the company produced the highly successful “Munster Koach” and “Drag-U-LA” coffin car, two vehicles that were seen on the hit television series *The Munsters*.

Trade insiders were surprised when AMT announced in the fall of 1966 that it would begin tooling to produce a model kit relating to *Star Trek*—a television show that was not even halfway through its first season. Desilu's attorney wrote the Licensing Corporation of America, the licensing arm of the studio where *Star Trek* was made, that AMT had great confidence in the show since “no manufacturing company would normally incur \$50,000 in tooling for heavy goods before the show went into its second year.”

A Full-Size Shuttlecraft

A close inspection of memos and letters between Desilu and AMT as they negotiated the terms for the first *Star Trek* kit revealed that the deal originally included a second model in addition to the *Enterprise*. That second model stemmed from Gene Roddenberry's ingenious method for getting crew members off the *Enterprise* on the show. Rather than land the entire ship of



This model of the *Enterprise*, which appears superimposed over a starry sky on the cover of this issue, was produced by AMT and is part of the Smithsonian Institution's collections. The kit was built and modified by Richard G. Van Treuren while serving aboard the naval aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk* (CV-63). He donated it to the Smithsonian in 1973. (Photo courtesy of the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum. AMT and design are registered trademarks of Round 2, LLC. All rights reserved. Image courtesy of CBS. TM & © 2021 CBS Studios Inc. All Rights Reserved.)

400 each time somebody wanted to deboard, he developed the transporter—a device that allowed individuals to dematerialize and then rematerialize to get them from one place to another at a huge cost savings for the show production.

Fans liked the idea but were quick to ask, “What if the transporters broke down or the ship was out of range?” Roddenberry's answer was to create a separate fleet of smaller spacecraft. Those smaller ships, or “shuttlecraft,” would be stored in a massive hangar located in the aft end of the secondary hull of the *Enterprise*. There, they could take off and land, much like fighter aircraft do on present-day aircraft carriers. The problem, however, was that the studio could barely afford to build the models and sets required to show the shuttlecraft in the series.

During August and September 1966, there emerged a deal that solved that problem. In exchange for the rights to produce both an *Enterprise* and a shuttlecraft model kit, AMT would construct “an exterior and interior of [the shuttlecraft] Galileo Seven.” The Michigan company would also build a 22-inch filming miniature. Desilu pitched in to fund the

construction of a scaled hangar deck model so that the miniature shuttlecraft could be filmed coming and going from the *Enterprise*.

AMT was uniquely qualified to construct the shuttlecraft model and full-size sets. At the time, it was the only model company that also built full-size cars after establishing the Speed and Custom Division Shop in Phoenix, Arizona, in 1966. An AMT subsidiary, the shop built scale models and full-scale mock-ups from which it pulled templates or masters that were then used to make dies for model-kit production.

The shop was headed by the legendary hot rod builder Gene Winfield, who was tasked with bringing to life the shuttlecraft designs submitted by *Star Trek*'s art director and production



Anthony Frederickson stocks shelves with AMT model kits in 1976 at the Federation Trading Post in Manhattan—the only pure *Star Trek* store in the galaxy. According to employee Doug Drexler, “The AMT kits were our top seller, right up there with Whitfield’s *The Making of Star Trek* and Joseph’s *Star Trek Technical Manual*.” Both Frederickson and Drexler later went on to work on *Star Trek* in Hollywood. (Photo courtesy of Doug Drexler.)



designer, Walter Matthew “Matt” Jefferies Jr.—the man who created the *Enterprise*. Winfield sought to make Jefferies’ original shuttlecraft designs less curvy to help reduce the cost of constructing the full-size prop and filming miniature. Winfield tapped the talents of industrial designer Thomas “Tom” W. Kellogg to help him with the redesign effort. Kellogg streamlined Jefferies’ original renderings to produce the final shuttlecraft look that we know today.

Models Hit the Shelves

AMT originally planned to release its *Enterprise* model kits during Christmas of 1966, but production was delayed. Kits finally began hitting store shelves in April 1967. By the end of July, retailers reported strong sales across the country. The

trade publication *Toys and Novelties* noted, “The surprising leader, for this time of year, of the top sellers last month was the STAR TREK plastic kit. One wholesale-dealer put results as ‘fantastic’ and most others agreed it was better than good.”

Early sales of the kit were so good that AMT requested that “the license of our company be extended for a minimum of one year.” At the same time, AMT sought “to extend the license to the entire world,” stating that it was “considering going into double tooling and [has] an association with a toy company in England” that would allow the kit’s release in the United Kingdom and Canada. AMT eventually made an agreement with Aurora to license its *Star Trek* kits overseas.

In a memo from October 19, 1967, *Star Trek* associate producer Bob Justman could barely contain his enthusiasm when he told Roddenberry about the record-breaking sales of the model kits: “The machine which turns out the plastic parts for the kit goes continually 24 hours a day, 7 days a

week and AMT is rushing another machine into production, so that they can keep up with the demand.”

Less than one year after its initial release, AMT’s *Enterprise* kit sold more than 1 million copies—outstripping AMT’s Munster Koach, which had previously been “the most successful plastic model kit in the business.”

The Klingon Ship Incident

Given the phenomenal sales success of the *Enterprise* kits, it is not known why AMT failed to immediately issue a model kit of the shuttlecraft *Galileo*. Perhaps the financial terms were less favorable than those AMT received for the *Enterprise*.

Even though a shuttlecraft model kit was not in the immediate future, AMT had its eye on making another *Star Trek* kit while the series was still on the air. In August 1967, the company began negotiations to produce a kit of the crew’s main enemy on the show, the Klingons.



Far left: A 1968 photo showing one of the AMT *Enterprise* model kits and its happy owner. (Photo courtesy of the author.) Left: This image captures the essence of growing up before the word “nerd” was popularized. Kipp Teague (pictured) described the scene: “It’s early 1969 and I’m shown reading my favorite comic book. In the background are a number of models, including AMT’s *Enterprise* and Klingon Battle Cruiser. Also on the shelf is the spaceship from the TV series *The Invaders*.” (Photo courtesy of Kipp Teague.)

When kits of the Klingon ship first began arriving in stores during the summer of 1968, AMT packaged them as the “Klingon Alien Battle Cruiser,” proclaiming on the box, “As Seen on *Star Trek*.” The only problem was that nobody had yet seen the bad guys’ spaceship on television.

A self-proclaimed “science fiction buff,” Whitfield made frequent trips to the *Star Trek* set while the model kits were being produced. “I considered myself quite familiar with the show, partly because of the work I had been doing for AMT and partly because I had seen virtually every episode that had been on the air,” wrote Whitfield in *The Making of Star Trek*. As a result of his visits, he got to know many of the production members on a first-name basis, including art director Matt Jefferies. In May 1967, Jefferies sent Whitfield a copy of the *Star Trek Writer’s Guide*. Whitfield’s first reaction was, “What a nifty basis for a *Star Trek* book!”

Whitfield had become good friends with Roddenberry and decided to approach him about writing a book about the making of the show. In September 1968, *The Making of Star Trek* was published. The book, the first ever written by Whitfield, provided detailed information about not only how *Star Trek* was made but also how

television in general worked during the 1960s. Even though the book included drawings of the Klingon ship done by Jefferies, at the time, the ship had not appeared on TV.

The *Star Trek* episode “Elaan of Troyius” marked the first screen appearance of the actual Klingon ship. Filming was completed in July 1968, but the episode did not air until December.

Meanwhile, another *Star Trek* episode titled “The Enterprise Incident” beamed into living rooms at the end of September, showing the Klingon ship entirely crewed by Romulans, another enemy in the show’s universe. In the episode, Mr. Spock explains that the Klingons shared their technology with the Romulans, which was why the *Enterprise* crew encountered a Klingon ship in Romulan space.

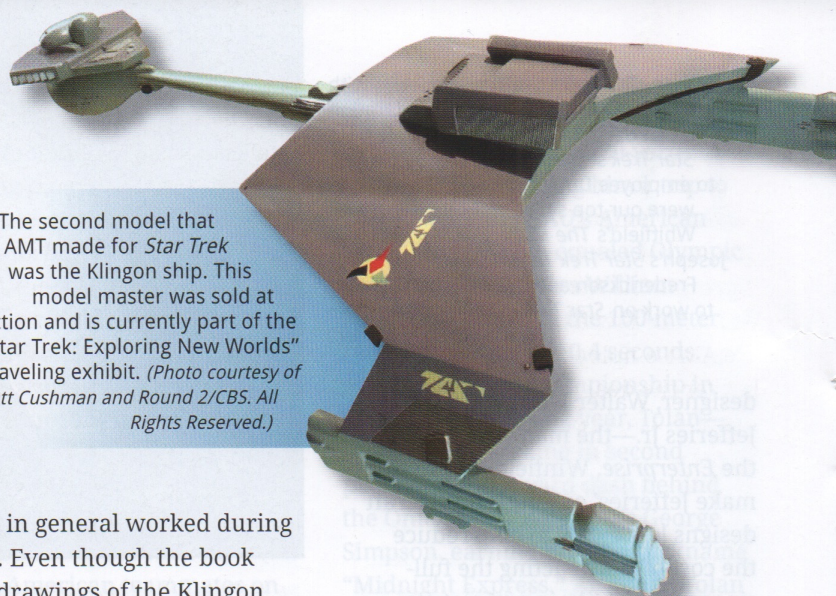
In reality, the original filming production model of the Romulan

ship could not be found after the earlier first-season shooting of the episode “Balance of Terror,” in which the new spaceship was featured. Thus Roddenberry was forced to improvise by substituting a Klingon ship rather than build a new Romulan one. The resulting confusion became a topic of discussion among fans. Nevertheless, like the *Enterprise* model before it, the new AMT model Klingon ship became a big seller.

Michigan’s Success Stories

There were two Michigan success stories that emerged from *Star Trek*’s first attempts to license products during the series’ original

The second model that AMT made for *Star Trek* was the Klingon ship. This model master was sold at auction and is currently part of the “*Star Trek: Exploring New Worlds*” traveling exhibit. (Photo courtesy of Matt Cushman and Round 2/CBS. All Rights Reserved.)



Left: The box art to the first model kit of the *Galileo* shuttlecraft, issued by AMT in 1974. (Photo courtesy the author and Round 2/CBS. All Rights Reserved.) Right: The original 1974 *Galileo* model is shown dwarfed by assembled versions of the retooled and much larger Round 2 kit that was released in 2020. (Photo courtesy of E. James Small and Round 2/CBS. All Rights Reserved.)



production run. One was the first appearance of the starship *Enterprise* and Klingon model kits manufactured by the Troy-based corporation. The other was the printing of *The Making of Star Trek* by Ballantine Books, which was written by Stephen Whitfield—the AMT employee who helped broker the deal that resulted in the production of the first *Star Trek* models. Both the *Enterprise* and Klingon ship models, along with the book, have outsold and outlasted most other products of the original *Star Trek* franchise. To this day, more than 50 years after their first appearances, they remain best sellers.

After the initial release of the *Enterprise* and Klingon model kits, AMT did not produce any other *Star Trek* kits until 1972, when it expanded upon the series product line to include a figure kit of Mr. Spock and models of the *Enterprise* bridge, Romulan ship, and K-7 Space Station.

In 1974, AMT finally released a model kit of the *Galileo* shuttlecraft, but like most of the *Star Trek* kits that came out during that period, it proved to be underwhelming. “After the excitement of the USS *Enterprise* and Klingon Battle Cruiser, the next few *Star Trek* model kits from AMT were disappointing,” said Karl Tate, longtime *Star Trek* fan and collector. “The kits became more like undersized toys meant for little kids. The AMT version of the *Galileo* shuttlecraft was more like a butter dish than an accurate model.”

AMT was eventually acquired by the Lesney Corporation, better known for its Matchbox brand. Under Lesney’s ownership, AMT came out with model kits supporting the various big-screen film versions of the franchise that began with the 1979 release of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*. Since

that time, Ertl, Revell, Bandai, and Moebius all have been licensed to release *Star Trek* model kits.

Round 2, LLC, is the current licensee of the original AMT *Star Trek* kits. The company has also produced new kits from the franchise, including a popular 1/350-scale kit of the original television series’ *Enterprise*.

In reflecting back upon the phenomenal success of the first *Enterprise* kit produced by AMT, Round 2 Senior Designer James Hood noted, “The original AMT *Enterprise* has been touted as the best-selling model kit of all time because it has essentially been in perpetual release since it was originally brought out in 1967.”

During the summer of 2020, Round 2 issued a completely new model kit of the *Galileo* shuttlecraft

that is larger and more detailed than the original 1974 AMT kit. At long last, fans now have an accurate model of the other spacecraft that originally helped propel the Michigan-based AMT Corporation to manufacture models that allowed millions of *Star Trek* enthusiasts “to boldly go where no man has gone before.” 🚀

Glen E. Swanson is the former historian of the NASA Johnson Space Center and founder of Quest: The History of Spaceflight Quarterly. He is also a cofounder of “Roger That!” an annual conference held in honor of astronaut Roger B. Chaffee, a Grand Rapids native who was killed in the Apollo 1 fire.

Right: The original box art for the first release of AMT’s *Enterprise* model kit (S921). The kit began appearing on store shelves beginning in April 1967. (Photo courtesy of the author and Round 2/CBS. All Rights Reserved.) Below: Gene Roddenberry is shown in his office in 1978 holding an assembled AMT model of the USS *Enterprise*. (Photo © Mary Evans/AF Archive/Cinetext/ Morgan/Mary Evans Picture Library Ltd./ agefotostock, MEV-12050606.)

