

# Rocket and Spacecraft Propulsion

Principles, Practice and New Developments (Second Edition)

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Martin J. L. Turner

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# Rocket and Spacecraft Propulsion

**Principles, Practice and New Developments  
(Second Edition)**

 **Springer**

Published in association with  
**Praxis Publishing**  
Chichester, UK

 PRAXIS

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SPRINGER-PRAXIS BOOKS IN ASTRONAUTICAL ENGINEERING  
SUBJECT ADVISORY EDITOR: John Mason B.Sc., M.Sc., Ph.D.

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ISBN 3-540-22190-5 Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg New York

Springer is part of Springer-Science + Business Media ([springeronline.com](http://springeronline.com))

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Bibliothek

Die Deutsche Bibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie;  
detailed bibliographic data are available from the Internet at <http://dnb.ddb.de>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004111933

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© Praxis Publishing Ltd, Chichester, UK and before Second Edition published 2005  
Reprinted 2006  
First edition published 2001  
Printed in Germany

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Cover design: Jim Wilkie

Typesetting: Originator, Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, UK

Printed on acid-free paper



# Contents

<b>Preface to the second edition</b> . . . . .	xiii
<b>Preface to the first edition</b> . . . . .	xv
<b>Acknowledgements</b> . . . . .	xvii
<b>List of figures</b> . . . . .	xix
<b>List of tables</b> . . . . .	xxiii
<b>List of colour plates</b> . . . . .	xxv
<b>1 History and principles of rocket propulsion</b> . . . . .	1
1.1 The development of the rocket . . . . .	1
1.1.1 The Russian space programme . . . . .	6
1.1.2 Other national programmes. . . . .	6
1.1.3 The United States space programme. . . . .	8
1.1.4 Commentary . . . . .	13
1.2 Newton's third law and the rocket equation . . . . .	14
1.2.1 Tsiolkovsky's rocket equation . . . . .	14
1.3 Orbits and spaceflight . . . . .	17
1.3.1 Orbits. . . . .	18
1.4 Multistage rockets . . . . .	25
1.4.1 Optimising a multistage rocket . . . . .	28
1.4.2 Optimising the rocket engines . . . . .	30
1.4.3 Strap-on boosters . . . . .	31
1.5 Access to space . . . . .	34

<b>2</b>	<b>The thermal rocket engine</b> . . . . .	35
2.1	The basic configuration . . . . .	35
2.2	The development of thrust and the effect of the atmosphere . . . . .	37
2.2.1	Optimising the exhaust nozzle . . . . .	41
2.3	The thermodynamics of the rocket engine . . . . .	42
2.3.1	Exhaust velocity . . . . .	43
2.3.2	Mass flow rate . . . . .	46
2.4	The thermodynamic thrust equation . . . . .	51
2.4.1	The thrust coefficient and the characteristic velocity . . . . .	52
2.5	Computing rocket engine performance . . . . .	56
2.5.1	Specific impulse . . . . .	57
2.5.2	Example calculations . . . . .	58
2.6	Summary . . . . .	60
<b>3</b>	<b>Liquid propellant rocket engines</b> . . . . .	61
3.1	The basic configuration of the liquid propellant engine . . . . .	61
3.2	The combustion chamber and nozzle . . . . .	62
3.2.1	Injection . . . . .	63
3.2.2	Ignition . . . . .	64
3.2.3	Thrust vector control . . . . .	67
3.3	Liquid propellant distribution systems . . . . .	69
3.3.1	Cavitation . . . . .	71
3.3.2	Pogo . . . . .	71
3.4	Cooling of liquid-fuelled rocket engines . . . . .	72
3.5	Examples of rocket engine propellant flow . . . . .	74
3.5.1	The Aestus engine on Ariane 5 . . . . .	74
3.5.2	The Ariane Viking engines . . . . .	75
3.5.3	The Ariane HM7 B engine . . . . .	77
3.5.4	The Vinci cryogenic upper-stage engine for Ariane 5 . . . . .	78
3.5.5	The Ariane 5 Vulcain cryogenic engine . . . . .	78
3.5.6	The Space Shuttle main engine . . . . .	81
3.5.7	The RS 68 engine . . . . .	83
3.5.8	The RL 10 engine . . . . .	85
3.6	Combustion and the choice of propellants . . . . .	86
3.6.1	Combustion temperature . . . . .	86
3.6.2	Molecular weight . . . . .	87
3.6.3	Propellant physical properties . . . . .	88
3.7	The performance of liquid-fuelled rocket engines . . . . .	90
3.7.1	Liquid oxygen–liquid hydrogen engines . . . . .	91
3.7.2	Liquid hydrocarbon–liquid oxygen engines . . . . .	93
3.7.3	Storable propellant engines . . . . .	93
<b>4</b>	<b>Solid propellant rocket motors</b> . . . . .	97
4.1	Basic configuration . . . . .	97
4.2	The properties and the design of solid motors . . . . .	99

4.3	Propellant composition . . . . .	100
4.3.1	Additives. . . . .	102
4.3.2	Toxic exhaust. . . . .	103
4.3.3	Thrust stability. . . . .	103
4.3.4	Thrust profile and grain shape. . . . .	104
4.4	Integrity of the combustion chamber . . . . .	106
4.4.1	Thermal protection . . . . .	107
4.4.2	Inter-section joints . . . . .	109
4.4.3	Nozzle thermal portection. . . . .	110
4.5	Ignition . . . . .	110
4.6	Thrust vector control . . . . .	111
4.7	Two modern solid boosters . . . . .	111
4.7.1	The Space Shuttle SRB . . . . .	111
4.7.2	The Ariane MPS . . . . .	113
<b>5</b>	<b>Launch vehicle dynamics. . . . .</b>	<b>115</b>
5.1	More on the rocket equation . . . . .	115
5.1.1	Range in the absence of gravity. . . . .	117
5.2	Vertical motion in the Earth's gravitational field . . . . .	120
5.2.1	Vehicle velocity . . . . .	120
5.2.2	Range. . . . .	122
5.3	Inclined motion in a gravitational field. . . . .	123
5.3.1	Constant pitch angle . . . . .	124
5.3.2	The flight path at constant pitch angle . . . . .	127
5.4	Motion in the atmosphere . . . . .	128
5.4.1	Aerodynamic forces. . . . .	129
5.4.2	Dynamic pressure . . . . .	130
5.5	The gravity turn . . . . .	131
5.6	Basic launch dynamics . . . . .	133
5.6.1	Airless bodies. . . . .	133
5.7	Typical Earth-launch trajectories. . . . .	135
5.7.1	The vertical segment of the trajectory . . . . .	136
5.7.2	The gravity turn or transition trajectory . . . . .	136
5.7.3	Constant pitch or the vacuum trajectory . . . . .	137
5.7.4	Orbital injection . . . . .	137
5.8	Actual launch vehicle trajectories . . . . .	139
5.8.1	The Mu-3-S-II launcher . . . . .	139
5.8.2	Ariane 4 . . . . .	141
5.8.3	Pegasus. . . . .	143
<b>6</b>	<b>Electric propulsion. . . . .</b>	<b>145</b>
6.1	The importance of exhaust velocity . . . . .	145
6.2	Revived interest in electric propulsion . . . . .	146
6.3	Principles of electric propulsion. . . . .	147
6.3.1	Electric vehicle performance . . . . .	148

6.3.2	Vehicle velocity as a function of exhaust velocity . . . . .	149
6.3.3	Vehicle velocity and structural/propellant mass . . . . .	150
6.4	Electric thrusters . . . . .	152
6.4.1	Electrothermal thrusters . . . . .	152
6.4.2	Arc-jet thrusters . . . . .	155
6.5	Electromagnetic thrusters . . . . .	157
6.5.1	Ion propulsion . . . . .	158
6.5.2	The space charge limit . . . . .	160
6.5.3	Electric field and potential . . . . .	162
6.5.4	Ion thrust . . . . .	163
6.5.5	Propellant choice . . . . .	164
6.5.6	Deceleration grid . . . . .	166
6.5.7	Electrical efficiency . . . . .	166
6.6	Plasma thrusters . . . . .	168
6.6.1	Hall effect thrusters . . . . .	170
6.6.2	Radiofrequency thrusters . . . . .	177
6.7	Low-power electric thrusters . . . . .	179
6.8	Electrical power generation . . . . .	180
6.8.1	Solar cells . . . . .	180
6.8.2	Solar generators . . . . .	181
6.8.3	Radioactive thermal generators . . . . .	181
6.8.4	Nuclear fission power generators . . . . .	184
6.9	Applications of electric propulsion . . . . .	187
6.9.1	Station-keeping . . . . .	189
6.9.2	Low Earth orbit to geostationary orbit . . . . .	190
6.9.3	Nine-month one-way mission to Mars . . . . .	191
6.9.4	Gravity loss and thrust . . . . .	191
6.10	Deep Space 1 and the NSTAR ion engine . . . . .	193
6.11	SMART-1 and the PPS-1350 . . . . .	194
<b>7</b>	<b>Nuclear propulsion.</b> . . . .	<b>197</b>
7.1	Power, thrust, and energy . . . . .	197
7.2	Nuclear fission basics . . . . .	199
7.3	A sustainable chain reaction . . . . .	202
7.4	Calculating the criticality . . . . .	203
7.5	The reactor dimensions and neutron leakage . . . . .	205
7.6	Control . . . . .	209
7.7	Reflection . . . . .	210
7.8	Prompt and delayed neutrons . . . . .	211
7.9	Thermal stability . . . . .	212
7.10	The principle of nuclear thermal propulsion . . . . .	213
7.11	The fuel elements . . . . .	214
7.12	Exhaust velocity of a nuclear thermal rocket . . . . .	216
7.13	Increasing the operating temperature . . . . .	218



7.14	The nuclear thermal rocket engine. . . . .	221
7.14.1	Radiation and its management . . . . .	221
7.14.2	Propellant flow and cooling . . . . .	224
7.14.3	The control drums . . . . .	226
7.14.4	Start-up and shut-down . . . . .	227
7.14.5	The nozzle and thrust generation . . . . .	228
7.15	Potential applications of nuclear engines. . . . .	229
7.16	Operational issues with the nuclear engine . . . . .	230
7.17	Interplanetary transfer manoeuvres . . . . .	231
7.18	Faster interplanetary journeys . . . . .	232
7.19	Hydrogen storage . . . . .	234
7.20	Development status of nuclear thermal engines . . . . .	235
7.21	Alternative reactor types . . . . .	241
7.22	Safety issues . . . . .	243
7.23	Nuclear propelled missions . . . . .	246
<b>8</b>	<b>Advanced thermal rockets . . . . .</b>	<b>249</b>
8.1	Fundamental physical limitations . . . . .	249
8.1.1	Dynamical factors. . . . .	249
8.2	Improving efficiency. . . . .	252
8.2.1	Exhaust velocity . . . . .	252
8.3	Thermal rockets in atmosphere, and the single stage to orbit . . . . .	255
8.3.1	Velocity increment for single stage to orbit . . . . .	256
8.3.2	Optimising the exhaust velocity in atmosphere . . . . .	258
8.3.3	The rocket equation for variable exhaust velocity . . . . .	259
8.4	Practical approaches to SSTO . . . . .	261
8.4.1	High mass ratio . . . . .	261
8.5	Practical approaches and developments . . . . .	263
8.5.1	Engines. . . . .	264
8.6	Vehicle design and mission concept. . . . .	272
8.6.1	Optimising the ascent . . . . .	272
8.6.2	Optimising the descent. . . . .	272
8.7	SSTO concepts . . . . .	273
8.7.1	The use of aerodynamic lift for ascent . . . . .	274
<b>Appendix 1</b>	<b>Orbital motion . . . . .</b>	<b>277</b>
A1.1	Recapitulation of circular motion . . . . .	277
A1.2	General (non-circular) motion of a spacecraft in a gravitational field . . . . .	278
<b>Appendix 2</b>	<b>Launcher survey . . . . .</b>	<b>283</b>
A2.1	Launch site. . . . .	283
A2.2	Launcher capability . . . . .	284

xii **Contents**

A2.3 Heavy launchers . . . . .	284
A2.4 Medium Launchers . . . . .	285
A2.5 Small launchers . . . . .	285
<b>Appendix 3</b> Ariane 5 . . . . .	299
A3.1 The basic vehicle components. . . . .	300
A3.2 Evolved Ariane 5. . . . .	300
<b>Appendix 4</b> Glossary of symbols . . . . .	303
<b>Further reading.</b> . . . . .	307
<b>Index</b> . . . . .	309

## Preface to the second edition

In the period since the publication of the first edition, rocket propulsion and launcher systems have experienced a number of major changes. The destruction of the Space Shuttle *Columbia*, on re-entry, and the tragic loss of seven astronauts, focused attention on NASA, its management systems, and on the shuttle programme itself. This led to a major re-direction of the NASA programme and to the plan to retire the Space Shuttle by 2010. At the same time, President Bush announced what was effectively an instruction to NASA to re-direct its programme towards a return of human explorers to the Moon, and to develop plans for a human Mars expedition. This has significant implications for propulsion, and, in particular, nuclear electric and nuclear thermal propulsion seem very likely to play a part in these deep space missions. The first example is likely to be the Jupiter Icy Moons Orbiter, to be powered by a nuclear electric thruster system.

I have thought it wise therefore to include a new chapter on nuclear thermal propulsion. This is based on the work done in the 1960s by both NASA and the Russian space agencies to develop and test nuclear rocket engines, with updates based on the latest thinking on this subject. There are also major revisions to the chapters on electric propulsion and chemical rocket engines. The rest of the book has been revised and updated throughout, and a new appendix on Ariane 5 has been provided. The planned update to the Space Shuttle sections has been abandoned, given its uncertain future.

Since its publication, this book has modestly fulfilled the hope I had for it, that it would prove useful to those requiring the basics of space propulsion, either as students or as space professionals. As a replacement for the now out of print first edition, I venture to hope that this second edition will prove equally useful.

*Martin J. L. Turner*  
Leicester University, June 2004

## Preface to the first edition

Rockets and launch vehicles are the keys to space exploration, space science and space commerce. Normally, the user of a launcher is several steps removed from the launcher itself; he may not even be present during spacecraft–launcher integration, and is usually far away at the moment of launch. Yet the few minutes of the launch can either fulfil the dreams and aspirations that have driven the mission for many years, or it can destroy them. As a space scientist I have worked on some half dozen missions in different space agencies; but it was not until I was present for the launch of Ginga, on a Japanese Mu-3-S rocket, that I actually came close to the vehicle and met the designers and engineers responsible for it. The Ginga launch was perfect, and I had agreeable discussions with the designer of the Mu rocket. I realised that I knew little about this most important component of a space mission; I had little idea of the engineering of rocket engines, and little knowledge of launch vehicle dynamics. In seeking to rectify this lamentable ignorance I found very few books on rockets which were accessible to non-specialists and yet were not trivial. Most of the work on rocket design was undertaken in the 1950s and 1960s, and many of the engineering books were published during that period. Moreover, since engineers care about numerical accuracy and precise detail (they have to) many of the books are extremely difficult for the non-specialist. It seemed, therefore, that there might be a place for a book dealing with the subject in a non-trivial way, but simplifying the mass of detail found in books intended for professional rocket engineers. I have never met a ‘rocket scientist’.

This book, then, is the result. I have tried to examine rockets and rocket engines from the point of view of a non-specialist. As a physicist I am inclined to look for the physical principles and for accessible explanations of how the rocket works. This necessarily requires some mathematics, but I have included as many graphs of functions as possible, to enable those who would prefer it, to eschew the formulae, and yet gain some feeling for the dependence of a rocket’s performance on its design. Whether or not I have succeeded, the reader will judge. To illustrate the principles I have used examples of real engines and launch vehicles, although the inclusion or exclusion of a particular engine or vehicle has been governed by convenience for

explanation, rather than the excellence or currency of the item itself. Appendix 2 includes a table of present-day launch vehicles, although this is not exhaustive, and new vehicles are constantly appearing.

My early research for this book indicated that the development of modern rockets took place mostly during the middle years of the last century, and that we were in the mature phase. The Space Shuttle had been around for 20 years, and was itself the epitome of rocket design; this is still true, but the closing years of the twentieth century have seen a renaissance in rocketry. While engines designed in the 1960s are still in use, new engines are now becoming available, and new vehicles are appearing in significant numbers. This seems to be driven by the rapidly growing commercial demand for launches, but is also the result of the opening up of Russian space technology to the world. I have tried to reflect this new spirit in the last two chapters, dealing with electric propulsion – now a reality – and the single stage to orbit, which is sure to be realised very soon. However, it is difficult to predict beyond the next few years where rocket design will lead us. The SSTO should reduce space access costs, and make space tourism possible, at least to Earth orbit. Commercial use of space will continue to grow, to support mobile communication and the Internet. These demands should result in further rocket development and cheaper access to space. Progress in my own field of space science is limited, not by ideas, but by the cost of scientific space missions. As a space scientist I hope that cheaper launches will mean that launches of spacecraft for scientific purposes will become less rare. As a human being I hope that new developments in rocket engines and vehicles will result in further human exploration of space: return to the Moon, and a manned mission to Mars.

This preface was originally written during the commissioning of the XMM–Newton X-ray observatory, which successfully launched on Ariane 504 in December 1999. The Ariane 5 is the latest generation of heavy launcher, and the perfection of its launch, which I watched, is a tribute to the rocket engineers who built it. But launching is still a risky business, however carefully the rocket is designed and assembled. There is always that thousand to one chance that something will go wrong; and as space users we have to accept that chance.

*Martin J. L. Turner*  
Leicester University, March 2000

# Acknowledgements

I have received help in the preparation of this book from many people, including my colleagues in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Leicester University and at the Space Research Centre, Leicester, and members of the XMM team. I am particularly grateful to the rocket engineers of ISAS, Lavotchkin Institute, Estec, and Arianespace, who were patient with my questions; the undergraduates who attended and recalled (more or less satisfactorily) lectures on rocket engines and launcher dynamics; and, of course, my editor, Bob Marriott. While the contents of this book owe much to these people, any errors are my own.

I am grateful to the following for permission to reproduce copyright material and technical information: Société National d'Etude et Construction de Moteurs d'Aviation (SNECMA), for permission to reproduce the propellant flow diagrams of Ariane engines (Figures 3.5, 3.6, 3.7 and 3.9 in the colour section); Boeing–Rocketdyne and the University of Florida, for permission to reproduce the SSME flow diagram (Figure 3.8, colour section) and the aerospike engine (Figure 7.11); NASA/JPL/California Institute of Technology, for permission to reproduce the picture of the Deep Space 1 ion engine (Figure 6.16 and cover); the European Space Agency, for the picture of the XMM–Newton launch on Ariane 504 (cover); and Mark Wade and *Encyclopaedia Astronautica*, for permission to use tabular material which appears in Chapters 2 and 3 and Appendix 2. Figure 6.15 is based on work by P.E. Sandorf in *Orbital and Ballistic Flight* (MIT Department of Aeronautics and Astronautics, 1960), cited in Hill and Peterson (see Further Reading). Other copyright material is acknowledged in the text.

# List of figures

1.1	Konstantin Tsiolkovsky . . . . .	3
1.2	Herman Oberth. . . . .	4
1.3	Robert Goddard . . . . .	5
1.4	The J-2 engine used for the upper stages of Saturn V . . . . .	10
1.5	The launch of the Space Shuttle <i>Atlantis</i> , 3 October 1985 . . . . .	11
1.6	Tsiolkovsky's rocket equation. . . . .	15
1.7	Spacecraft movement. . . . .	19
1.8	Orbit shapes . . . . .	20
1.9	Injection velocity and altitude. . . . .	23
1.10	Multistaging . . . . .	26
1.11	Launch vehicle with boosters . . . . .	32
2.1	A liquid-fuelled rocket engine. . . . .	36
2.2	A solid-fuelled rocket motor. . . . .	36
2.3	Forces in the combustion chamber and exhaust nozzle . . . . .	38
2.4	Gas flow through the nozzle. . . . .	39
2.5	Static force due to atmospheric pressure . . . . .	40
2.6	P–V diagram for a heat engine . . . . .	43
2.7	Gas velocity as a function of the pressure ratio . . . . .	45
2.8	Mass flow in the nozzle . . . . .	46
2.9	Variation of flow density through the nozzle . . . . .	48
2.10	Area, velocity and flow density relative to the throat valves as a function of the pressure ratio . . . . .	50
2.11	Expansion ratio as a function of the pressure ratio for changing $\gamma$ . . . . .	53
2.12	Thrust coefficient plotted against expansion ratio for different atmospheric pressures. . . . .	55
2.13	Characteristic velocity as a function of the combustion temperature and molecular weight. . . . .	56
3.1	Schematic of a liquid-propellant engine . . . . .	62

3.2	Injection and combustion . . . . .	63
3.3	Types of injector . . . . .	65
3.4	The impinging jet injector . . . . .	66
3.5	The Aestus engine on Ariane 5 . . . . .	75
3.6	The pump-fed variant Aestus engine firing. In this test the long nozzle extension has been removed . . . . .	76
3.7	The Vinci cryogenic upper-stage engine . . . . .	79
3.8	The Vulcain 2 under test . . . . .	80
3.9	The SSME on a test stand . . . . .	82
3.10	The RS 68 engine firing . . . . .	84
3.11	The RL 10 engine . . . . .	85
3.12	The variation of exhaust velocity, temperature and molecular weight for different propellant combinations . . . . .	88
4.1	Schematic of a solid-fuelled rocket motor . . . . .	98
4.2	Cross-sections of grains . . . . .	105
4.3	Thermal protection . . . . .	108
4.4	The Ariane MPS solid booster . . . . .	114
5.1	Velocity function as a function of mass ratio . . . . .	117
5.2	Range as a function of mass ratio . . . . .	119
5.3	Gravity loss: velocity gain and thrust-to-weight ration . . . . .	122
5.4	Thrust and pitch angle . . . . .	124
5.5	Gravity loss: velocity gain and pitch angle . . . . .	126
5.6	Flight path angle as a function of time and pitch angle . . . . .	128
5.7	The aerodynamic forces acting on a rocket . . . . .	129
5.8	Dynamic pressure, velocity and altitude as functions of mass ratio . . . . .	130
5.9	Flight path angles and velocity as functions of time for a gravity turn . . . . .	133
5.10	Velocity, acceleration and altitude as functions of time . . . . .	140
5.11	Dynamic pressure and pitch angle as functions of time . . . . .	140
5.12	Ariane 4 dynamic parameters . . . . .	142
5.13	Pegasus dynamic parameters . . . . .	143
6.1	Vehicle velocity and payload fraction as a function of exhaust velocity . . . . .	146
6.2	Vehicle velocity as a function of exhaust velocity and burn time . . . . .	150
6.3	Vehicle velocity as a function of payload/propellant mass and exhaust velocity . . . . .	151
6.4	Vehicle velocity as a function of power supply efficiency and exhaust velocity . . . . .	151
6.5	Schematic of an electrothermal thruster . . . . .	153
6.6	Schematic of an arc-jet thruster . . . . .	156
6.7	A schematic diagram of the NSTAR ion thruster . . . . .	159
6.8	The NSTAR engine mounted on Deep Space 1 for testing . . . . .	160
6.9	Electric field and potential in space charge limit . . . . .	163
6.10	Thrust per unit area as a function of quiescent field for an ion thruster . . . . .	164
6.11	Exhaust velocity and ion species for an ion thruster . . . . .	165
6.12	Thrust-to-power ratio for various ions as a function of exhaust velocity . . . . .	168
6.13	Two ion engines that were used on the ESA Artemis spacecraft to raise the perigee . . . . .	168
6.14	Principle of the plasma thruster . . . . .	169
6.15	Principle of the Hall effect thruster . . . . .	172



6.16	Schematic of the Hall thruster . . . . .	172
6.17	The Russian SP-100 Hall effect thruster . . . . .	174
6.18	A Russian D-100 TAL Hall thruster with a metallic anode layer . . . . .	175
6.19	The concept of the VASIMIR radiofrequency plasma thruster . . . . .	178
6.20	A complete RTG, cutaway. . . . .	182
6.21	A single section of a RTG heat generator . . . . .	183
6.22	A Stirling cycle mechanical electricity generator . . . . .	184
6.23	An early United States designed nuclear fission power generator . . . . .	185
6.24	An early design for a spacecraft with nuclear electric generation . . . . .	186
6.25	The JIMO mission concept, powered by a fission reactor electrical system . . .	188
6.26	The propellant efficiency as a function of the ratio of the vehicle velocity to the exhaust velocity. . . . .	189
6.27	Velocity increment loss factor as a function of thrust-to-weight ratio for electric propulsion . . . . .	192
6.28	The NSTAR ion thruster operating on the Deep Space 1 spacecraft . . . . .	194
7.1	Test firing of a nuclear rocket engine at Jackass Flats in Nevada. . . . .	199
7.2	Schematic graph of the cross section for neutron interactions in natural uranium . . . . .	201
7.3	The fission chain . . . . .	205
7.4	The NRX-NERVA nuclear rocket engine at the test stand . . . . .	210
7.5	The principle of nuclear thermal propulsion. . . . .	213
7.6	Fuel element assembly from the KIWI reactor core . . . . .	216
7.7	The KIWA A-Prime reactor on its test stand. . . . .	217
7.8	Cutaway drawing of a NERVA nuclear rocket engine . . . . .	224
7.9	Close-up of the propellant delivery part of the NERVA engine . . . . .	225
7.10	The hot bleed cycle . . . . .	226
7.11	The Earth–Mars minimum energy transfer orbit . . . . .	233
7.12	A short flight to Mars . . . . .	233
7.13	The transit time to Mars as a function of initial delta-V and orbit eccentricity	234
7.14	The KIWI reactor . . . . .	236
7.15	The NERVA family of engines. . . . .	241
7.16	The scheme for approval of the use of Radioactive Thermal Generators on spacecraft for launch in the United States . . . . .	245
8.1	Separation of two masses. . . . .	250
8.2	Propulsion efficiency as a function of mass ratio . . . . .	251
8.3	Thrust coefficient <i>in vacuo</i> as a function of pressure ratio . . . . .	254
8.4	Velocity increment and mass ratio necessary to reach orbit, as a function of burn time . . . . .	257
8.5	Instantaneous thrust coefficient as a function of pressure through the atmosphere for fixed and variable ratios . . . . .	259
8.6	Normalised vehicle velocity as a function of mass ratio for fixed and variable expansion . . . . .	260
8.7	Flow separation in a nozzle . . . . .	265
8.8	Principle of the plug nozzle . . . . .	266
8.9	Plug nozzle exhaust streams for varying atmospheric pressure. . . . .	267

xxii **List of figures**

<b>8.10</b>	Principle of the aerospike nozzle . . . . .	268
<b>8.11</b>	The linear aerospike engine . . . . .	269
<b>A1.1</b>	Circular motion . . . . .	277
<b>A1.2</b>	Non-circular motion . . . . .	278

# List of tables

<b>1.1</b>	The Saturn V rocket . . . . .	31
<b>3.1</b>	Combustion temperature and exhaust velocity for different propellants . . . . .	87
<b>3.2</b>	Liquid oxygen engines . . . . .	92
<b>3.3</b>	Storable propellant engines . . . . .	94
<b>4.1</b>	Two modern solid boosters . . . . .	112
<b>6.1</b>	Development status and heritage of some Hall effect thrusters. . . . .	176
<b>7.1</b>	Melting/sublimation points of some common constituents of nuclear rocket cores . . . . .	214
<b>7.2</b>	Complete nuclear thermal rocket engine schemes based on the NERVA programme . . . . .	220
<b>7.3</b>	The tests carried out for the NERVA programme up to 1972 . . . . .	238
<b>A.2.1</b>	Launchers. . . . .	286

## List of colour plates (between pages 150 and 151)

- 1 The Ariane 5 Aestus engine.
- 2 The Ariane Viking engine.
- 3 The Ariane HM7 B engine.
- 4 The Space Shuttle main engine.
- 5 The Ariane 5 Vulcain cryogenic engine.
- 6 The launch of Apollo 16 on the Saturn V rocket.
- 7 Test firing of RL 10 engine.
- 8 Firing test of the Space Shuttle main engine.
- 9 Testing the thrust vector control system on a Space Shuttle main engine while firing.
- 10 Titan IV launcher.
- 11 The NSTAR ion engine mounted on Deep Space 1 prepared for testing in a vacuum.
- 12 The NSTAR ion engine firing in a vacuum tank.
- 13 Artists impression of Deep Space 1.
- 14 The PPS 1350 Hall effect engine used for SMART-1, under test.
- 15 Artists impression of the SMART-1 spacecraft on its way to the Moon.
- 16 Experimental ion propulsion system under test.
- 17 The NERVA Nuclear Thermal Rocket Engine.
- 18 A NERVA programme engine on the test stand.
- 19 A possible Mars expedition vehicle powered by three nuclear thermal rocket engines (artists impression).
- 20 An exploded view of the Ariane 5 launcher—see Appendix 3.