“What the hell are you doing?” How I learned to interview astronauts, scientists, and billionaires

Two Teslas drove up to the plane, the first with Musk driving his boys and the second with two security guys. Musk strode onto the jet, saw me, and said he didn’t realize I was going to be on the plane. (A great start to things!) Musk then took out his phone and started a heated conversation about digging tunnels. By this point, I was willing myself to disappear. I just wanted to melt into the leather seat I was sitting in about three feet from Musk.

So much for a good mood for the interview.

As the jet climbed, the phone conversation got worse, but then Musk lost his connection. He put away his phone and turned to me, saying he was free to talk. His mood, almost as if by magic, changed. Since we were discussing the early days of SpaceX at Kwajalein, he gathered the boys around so they could hear about their dad’s earlier days. The interview went shockingly well, and at least part of the reason has to be that I knew the subject matter deeply, had prepared, and was passionate about it. We spoke for nearly two hours before Musk asked if he might have some time with his kids. They spent the rest of the flight playing video games, yucking it up.

April 2025: Butch Wilmore

When they’re on the record, astronauts mostly stick to a

script. As a reporter, you’re just not going to get too much from them. (Off the record is a completely different story, of course, as astronauts are generally delightful, hilarious, and earnest people.)

Last week, dozens of journalists were allotted 10-minute interviews with Wilmore and, separately, Suni Williams. It was the first time they had spoken in depth with the media since their launch on Starliner and return to Earth aboard a Crew Dragon vehicle. As I waited outside Studio A at Johnson Space Center, I overheard Wilmore completing an interview with a Tennessee-based outlet, where he is from. As they wrapped up, the public affairs officer said he had just one more interview left and said my name. Wilmore said something like, “Oh good, I’ve been waiting to talk with him.”

https://arstechnica.com/space/2025/04/private-jets-awkward-convos-and-kazakh-vodka-my-most-memorable-interviews/