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Canadian astronaut David Williams tries out a submersible designed by Phil Nuytten and his company Nuytco.

Astronaut gives mini sub seal of approval

By ALAN DANIELS

Canadian astronaut Dave Williams went from deep space to deep water Tuesday, borrowing the keys to a personal submarine owned by North Vancouver's Phil Nuytten and setting off under Burrard Inlet for a test drive.

On the dockside, the designer of the Newtsuit diving apparatus, and now

his latest invention DeepWorker — with Williams at the controls — was star-struck.

"I'd love to travel into space," Nuytten said. "There's nothing I would like more. If I had the opportunity, I'd shed all the lard and go for it."

Nuytten, head of Nuytco Research Ltd., a world leader in subsea technology, notes that water and space are not

such disparate environments.

"There's a striking similarity in the technology used in inner space and outer space," he said. "There's a commonality in the armour of technology used to protect us as we go where we are not designed to go."

Nuytten said his company has so far

See DEEPWORKER TERMED D2

DeepWorker termed underwater sports car

From D1

sold 20 of the \$500,000 US DeepWorker submarines since the prototype was launched in Vancouver harbour three years ago.

"We are cutting steel for hull number 20 right now," he said. "We are up to our earlobes in orders."

"What's really surprising is not how many we've sold, but how many competing buyers there are now for navies around the world. It's our most successful product so far. Right on its heels is Exosuit."

Williams, a medical doctor who spent five days in space in 1998 investigating how space travel affects the brain, was an early proponent of Nuytten's first product, the Newtsuit, a revolutionary diving suit that has its own atmosphere.

When he landed in Vancouver this week for a series of speaking engagements — including Tuesday at the Planetarium — he asked Nuytten if he could take DeepWorker for a spin.

Afterwards, Williams described the submarine as "incredible, great technology."

"It was outstanding. I was really impressed with the capability of getting it to the bottom, hovering, manoeuvring back and forth. It was a great pleasure to fly the sub."

Williams said astronauts train

in water in preparation for walking in space.

"There's no question Canada has played a key role in NASA's ability to do space walks," he said. "The type of technology that Phil and others have been working on is very appropriate as we push on to Mars."

DeepWorker has been described as "an underwater sports car" because of its high-performance characteristics.

"It really is a zippy, single-seater you can roar around with underwater," Nuytten said. "There's no tether. It's free in the water and able to rock and roll at will."

"You can go to 2,000 feet yet it weighs only two tons. You can load it in the back of a pick-up truck."

He said international orders for the \$100,000 Exosuit are also strong.

Part diving suit, part swimsuit, part spacesuit, the prototype was unveiled at a trade show in New Orleans two years ago.

It looks like something out of the Saturday morning cartoons — Robocop meets Batman — but Nuytten believes it might be the biggest breakthrough since the development of scuba gear for sports, military, scientific and technical diving purposes.

"It's a hard-shelled scuba suit," he said. "It has an outside shell that protects the wearer from pressure. Yet because it has a titanium skeleton with a composite fibre skin, it's lightweight."

"It has a completely self-contained life-support system that enables the wearer to stay submerged at depths of up to 600 feet for 48 hours."

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