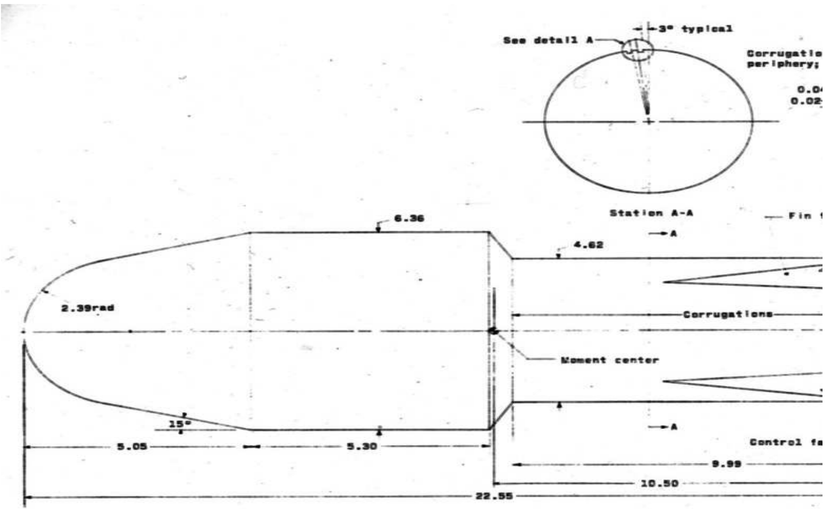
Aerospace Projects Review Extras!!

Little Joe II launcher for suborbital LEM flights, 1965

In the early days of the Apollo project, many plans were made for tests that never came to pass. One idea was to launch the Lunar Excursion Module onto a suborbital trajectory.... shooting it above the atmosphere so that its reaction control systems and ascent and descent engines could be tested. The Little Joe II booster, which was used to test the Apollo capsules abort tower, was though capable of such a mission. Consequently, a wind tunnel model was made of the Little Joe II/LEM configuration, and tested at supersonic speeds in the wind tunnels of the NASA-Langley Research Center in Virginia. The design was stable, but became less so at increasing Mach number. Two sizes of fin were tested.

In the end, tests of the lunar module were carried out not suborbitally, and unmanned, but manned and in orbit.



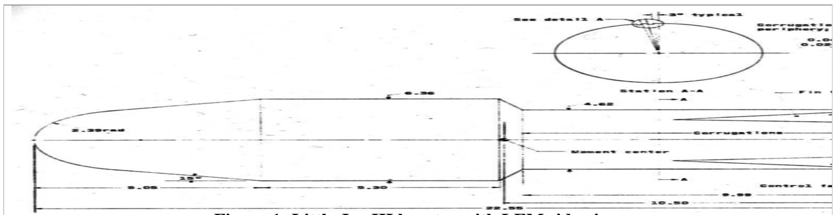


Figure 1: Little Joe III booster with LEM side view
Scale is 0.030, dimensions are in inches.
NASA

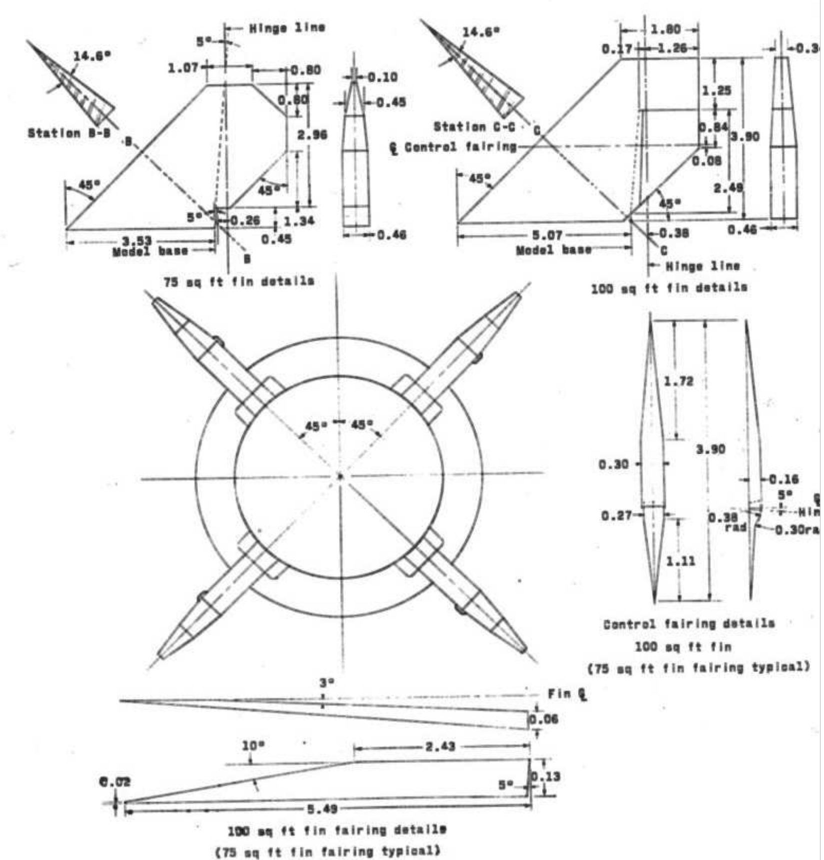


Figure 2: Little Joe III booster with LEM end view and scrap views showing different fins.
NASA

Reference: "Static Stability and Control Characteristics of a 0.030-Scale Model of a Little Joe II-LEM Space Vehicle at Mach 1.57 TO 4.63," NASA TM X-1139, Langley Research Center,

September 1965

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