Airports were once glamorous, but now the time has come for the age of the spaceport.

“One of our spacecraft is missing,” the Russians admitted last month. There was no Cold War-like fear of covert superpower sabotage as there might have been in the days of the space race, but this mysterious disappearance alarmed a nervous aerospace industry.

The launch of the $1.4bn Russian communications satellite abroad a Proton rocket from Kazakhstan seemed to go fine and flight controllers had just begun to celebrate when it vanished from the radar screens. It worried an industry that has become more dependent on Russia’s launch capability to reach the International Space Agency since the retirement of NASA’s Space Shuttle earlier this year.

It also came just days after the Russian space agency Roscosmos said it would be moving resources away from manned flight to commercial satellites.

The failure recouped attention on the future of space travel now that NASA’s Space Shuttle is a museum piece.

Our satellite correspondent Mark Williamson visited the Baikonur launch site in Kazakhstan a few weeks before the disappearance of the Express-AM (p36).

Baikonur doesn’t t the Hollywood countdowns: spectators are allowed to watch at close hand and the building design couldn’t be more different to what America is building for future space launches.

Construction has started on the world’s first commercial spaceport, designed by Foster and Partners, in the New Mexico desert. It is where Virgin Galactic will launch its first tourists into space – as early as next year if all goes to plan. Take a look at the extraordinary trilobite-shaped buildings and find out how the centre plans to give people a holiday that’s out of this world even before blast-off in our feature on p33.

The shuttle became a 20th-century design icon. We take a quick look at other great transport designs in this issue, of the wheeled – and legged – variety. Mobility scooters are a growing business but there are many more ingenious ways of helping people with personal mobility problems to get around. We pick ten of the best on p54.

This month’s picture essay celebrates the two millionth Mini to roll off the BMW conveyor in Oxford (p44). The Mini is of course a car design classic. But there’s another – for a certain generation, possibly greater – classic coming up for auction next month.

The ever-so-pink Panther is on p30. Altogether now: Well, here he is, the Pink Panther. The rinky-dink panther...

Reusable solid rocket boosters (SRBs), Pinkie’s main main in life-space shuttle lift off tower and soaring up to altitude of about 400km, are aimed to be more different to what America is close hand and the building design couldn’t be more different to what America is building for future space launches. The shuttle became a 20th-century design icon. We take a quick look at other great transport designs in this issue, of the wheeled – and legged – variety. Mobility scooters are a growing business but there are many more ingenious ways of helping people with personal mobility problems to get around. We pick ten of the best on p54.

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