

SpaceX launches first astronauts for NASA on test flight

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Image 1. A SpaceX Falcon 9, with NASA astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken in the Crew Dragon capsule, vents fuel as it prepares to lift off from Pad 39A at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, May 30, 2020. Photo by: Chris O'Meara/Associated Pressrocket from American soil, a first for a private company. Photo: Chris O'Meara/Associated Press

On May 30, the company SpaceX made history. It launched its Demo-2 space mission from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. It was the first time SpaceX sent astronauts to space. SpaceX is a private American aerospace company.

Demo-2 has two parts. They are the Falcon 9 rocket and the Crew Dragon capsule. Bob Behnken and Doug Hurley were inside the capsule. They are NASA astronauts. NASA is the U.S. space agency. The capsule flew to the International Space Station (ISS).

Demo-2 was supposed to launch on May 27. However, the launch was canceled at the last minute. Bad weather made it unsafe to fly.

President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence watched the launch at the Kennedy Space Center. NASA expected many other visitors. However, it told people not to come to watch the launch. It would be unsafe because of the coronavirus pandemic. Health officials are saying people

should stay away from crowds. This will help slow the spread of the illness. Still, more than 150,000 people watched on May 27.

Making History

Demo-2 made history. It was the first time in 10 years that the U.S. sent humans to the ISS. Demo-2 also represents a new age of space travel. Before, government agencies such as NASA managed space travel. Now, private companies such as SpaceX are sending missions to space.

NASA stopped sending shuttles to space in 2011. Since then, astronauts have gone to space on Russian spacecraft.

In 2010, NASA made a big decision. It began using private space companies to send astronauts to space. NASA chose SpaceX and Boeing in 2014.

Demo-2 is SpaceX's final test. If it passes, NASA will begin using SpaceX spacecraft. NASA will stop using the Russian spacecraft.

Demo-2 took off from Pad 39A. Pad 39A is famous. The Apollo 11 mission took off from Pad 39A. Apollo 11 took the first humans to the moon.

On May 30, Behnken and Hurley took an elevator up to the capsule.

Checking The Systems Before Takeoff

Then, Behnken and Hurley checked the capsule's computer systems. They also turned on the abort system. An abort system cancels the mission.

Abort systems were added in 1986. That year, the space shuttle Challenger broke apart after take off. All the astronauts died. Challenger did not have an abort system. Now, spacecraft have an abort system. The systems help save the astronauts if there is a problem with the spacecraft.

After the systems were checked, Crew Dragon took off for the ISS.

It took Behnken and Hurley about 19 hours to reach the ISS. During that time, the astronauts ran tests. NASA will look at the tests. They will help NASA decide if Crew Dragon is ready to take humans to space.

Crew Dragon flies on its own. However, it does have controls the astronauts can use. Hurley piloted NASA's last mission to the ISS. He will also pilot Crew Dragon during Demo-2.

Bringing Home An American Flag

Hurley plans to pick up an American flag at the ISS. He and his crewmates left the flag during NASA's last mission there. They said the next crew in the ISS would bring it home.

On May 31, Behnken and Hurley finally arrived at the ISS. They will stay for one to four months.

SpaceX expects Crew-1 to happen in August. Crew-1 will be Crew Dragon's first NASA-approved mission. Behnken and Hurley may have to leave the ISS to make room for Crew-1.

Crew-1 will carry three NASA astronauts. They are Victor Glover, Mike Hopkins and Shannon Walker. A Japanese astronaut will also join. His name is Soichi Noguchi.

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