SpaceX plans November test flight to space station

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A model of SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket is shown to the media at the National Press Club in April 2011 in Washington, DC. California-based rocket maker SpaceX said that it will make a test flight in late November to the International Space Station, now that NASA has retired its space shuttle program.

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"SpaceX has been hard at work preparing for our next flight -- a mission designed to demonstrate that a privately-developed space transportation system can deliver cargo to and from the International Space Station (ISS)," the company, also called Space Exploration Technologies, said in a statement.

The mission is the second to be carried out by SpaceX, one of a handful of firms competing to make a spaceship to replace the now-defunct US shuttle, which had been used to carry supplies and equipment to the orbiting outpost.

"NASA has given us a November 30, 2011 launch date, which should be followed nine days later by Dragon berthing at the ISS," the company said.

It said the arrival of the vessel at the space station would herald "the beginning of a new era in space travel."

"Together, government and the private sector can simultaneously increase the reliability, safety and frequency of space travel, while greatly reducing the costs," SpaceX said.

The company won $75 million in new seed money earlier this year, after it became the first to successfully send its own space capsule, the gumdrop-shaped Dragon, into orbit and back in December 2010.

The shuttle Atlantis completed its final journey to the ISS and back last month, ending the 30-year-old US space shuttle program.

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