

Venus Express nears its launch date

October 13 2005

The European Space Agency's Venus Express spacecraft was attached to a Soyuz-Fregat upper-stage rocket this week in preparation for an Oct. 26 launch.

The composite unit of the launch vehicle adapter and the spacecraft, together called the "stack," was mechanically joined with the Fregat upper-stage rocket.

The ESA classified the procedure as hazardous since both the spacecraft and the Fregat upper-stage are already fully loaded with highly flammable and toxic propellant. Venus Express carries around 1,256 pounds of propellant and Fregat about 11,000 pounds.

Upcoming preparations include connection of the umbilical cables between Fregat and the LVA, through which the Venus Express spacecraft is powered and commanded while still on the ground.

The Venus Express follows the ESA's Mars Express mission. After liftoff from Baikonur, Kazakhstan, the 153-day trip to Venus will end in April next year when the spacecraft will be captured by Venusian gravity and swings into an orbit.

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