

# New Horizons Launch Vehicle Fully Assembled For Voyage To Pluto

December 28 2005

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This past week was a busy one for New Horizons. Mission operations practices continued, as did engineering paperwork closeouts.

Other major activities included:

- The final tasks associated with mating the spacecraft and third stage to our Atlas launch vehicle.
- A suite of integrated electrical testing of the spacecraft-third stage-

Atlas stack.

-- A stress test of the New Horizons spacecraft Power Distribution Unit (PDU) in response to an anomaly investigation surrounding a pair of commands the PDU dropped before executing on 19-20 November.

-- A dry run of RTG-spacecraft mating activities.

-- Draining and preparations to begin drying our Atlas fuel tank in preparation for boroscope inspections set for January 3rd and 4th.

The final NASA Headquarters pre-launch mission review.

In other news of the week, New Horizons science team collaborator Marc Buie and four coworkers submitted a research paper to *The Astronomical Journal* describing some new results about Pluto's just-discovered small satellites, which have been temporarily dubbed "P1" and "P2". This is posted on the web.

In brief, Buie et al. faintly detected P1 and P2 in almost two dozen HST images of Pluto made in 2002. They then used that data to refine the orbits of the new satellites.

They also managed to eek out colors for the two moons: P1 is neutrally colored, but P2 is red. Why are they different? No one knows, but variety is the spice of life, and these new results indicate New Horizons is going to see a lot of that when it visits the Pluto system.

The Holidays upon us now are providing a well earned break for most of the New Horizons team. With that break, also comes a time of reflection. We are very proud of the spacecraft and launcher we built and tested in 2005, and we are even prouder to think that we're so close to flying the capstone mission in the initial reconnaissance of the planets.

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