

Russia's Kliper Shuttle To Be Launched In 2015

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A new reusable space craft designed in Russia will start delivering crews and supplies to the world's sole civilian orbital station in 2015, the head of Russia's leading space corporation said Wednesday, reports RIA Novosti.

The General Director and chief designer of Energia, Nikolai Sevastyanov said the Kliper would replace the Soyuz spaceship, the veteran workhorse of the Russian and Soviet space programs, for taking crews and supplies to the International Space Station (ISS).

RIA Novosti reports that the first unmanned flight of the Kliper has been set for 2012, and the first manned flight has been scheduled for 2013, according to Sevostyanov. The six-man craft will be able to double the current number of crewmembers being taken to the ISS.

The new shuttle has a number of advantages. For example, it will be equipped with an orbital transfer vehicle and a container with a capacity of 12 metric tons, compared with the Soyuz's two-ton capacity. This will cut transportation costs considerably, Sevastyanov said.

Russia has borne the main burden of bringing crews and cargoes to the ISS in recent years, as the United States was forced to ground its shuttle fleet for two and half years after Columbia crashed in February 2003, killing all seven astronauts on board. Flights only resumed in July last year, when Discovery completed a mission successfully.

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