

Mars orbiter makes a grab for red planet

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NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter was going through maneuvers to place itself into orbit around the red planet Friday, scientists in California said.

There are already five missions orbiting around the planet, but the MRO is the most technologically advanced, with the highest resolution camera.

The "orbit insertion burn," the thrusting that will help the MRO shape itself around the planet, was expected to begin shortly before 5 p.m. EST.

The MRO "will examine Mars' surface, atmosphere and underground

layers in great detail from a low orbit," scientists at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena reported. "It will aid future missions by scouting possible landing sites and relaying communications. It will send home up to 10 times as much data per minute as any previous Mars mission."

Staff at the Pasadena control center cheered as each crucial step was completed Friday afternoon.

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