

Atlantis Returns to Kennedy Space Center

July 3 2007

The space shuttle Atlantis and its seven-member crew lifted off Friday from NASA's Kennedy Space Center at 7:38 p.m. EDT to continue construction of the International Space Station.

Shortly before launch, on behalf of the entire crew, Atlantis' Commander Rick Sturckow thanked the teams that help make this launch possible, and then added, "See you in a couple of weeks."

During the 11-day mission, designated STS-117, the crew will add a new structural component to the station, deploy a new set of solar arrays and retract an existing array. Similar construction work was conducted on the previous two shuttle missions.

The mission will deliver and install the 17.5 ton S3/S4 truss segments. This latest addition to the station's backbone will extend the right side of the truss and includes a new set of solar arrays. When unfolded, the 240-foot arrays provide additional power to the station in preparation for the arrival of new science modules from the European and Japanese space agencies. The crew also will retract a solar array to allow for the rotation of the new arrays to track the sun.

The station's newest resident also is traveling aboard Atlantis. Astronaut Clayton Anderson will join the Expedition 15 crew. Sunita Williams, who has been aboard the station since December, will return to Earth with the Atlantis crew. Anderson is scheduled to return to Earth on space shuttle Discovery's STS-120 mission in October.

Atlantis' crew is Sturckow, Pilot Lee Archambault and mission specialists Patrick Forrester, Steven Swanson, John "Danny" Olivas, Jim Reilly and Anderson.

Atlantis originally was targeted for launch in March, but a hail storm damaged foam insulation on the shuttle's external fuel tank and forced managers to roll the spacecraft off the pad to make repairs.

Source: NASA

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