

Atlantis Begins Mission to the Space Station

February 7 2008



Credit: NASA

Space shuttle Atlantis and its seven-member crew lifted off at 2:45 p.m. EST on Thursday, Feb. 7 from NASA's Kennedy Space Center to begin the STS-122 mission to the International Space Station.

During the 11-day flight, Commander Steve Frick and his six crewmates will install the European Space Agency's Columbus laboratory on the station. Columbus will expand the research facilities of the station and provide scientists around the world with the ability to conduct a variety of life, physical and materials science experiments. The mission will include three spacewalks, delivery of a new crew member to the station and the return of another astronaut after nearly four months aboard the complex.

Shortly before launch, Frick thanked the teams that helped make the

launch possible.

"We're looking forward to a great flight and coming back to see our families in two weeks," Frick said. "It looks like today's a good day, and we're ready to go fly."

Joining Frick on STS-122 are pilot Alan Poindexter and mission specialists Leland Melvin, Rex Walheim, Stanley Love and European Space Agency astronauts Hans Schlegel and Leopold Eyharts. Eyharts will replace current station resident Dan Tani, who has lived on the outpost since October. Eyharts will return to Earth on shuttle Endeavour's STS-123 mission, which is currently targeted for launch on March 11, 2008.

During the countdown, a newly-designed connector in the shuttle's fuel sensor system performed normally. The STS-122 mission was twice delayed in December 2007 after false readings occurred in that system while Atlantis' external fuel tank was being filled.

Tests revealed that open circuits in the external tank's feed through connector were the most likely cause. A modified connector, designed with pins and sockets soldered together, was installed for the mission. The sensor system is one of several that protects the shuttle's main engines by triggering their shut down if fuel runs unexpectedly low.

Source: NASA

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