

Controllers Cheer as Data Arrive from NASA's Spirit Rover

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The deck of NASA's Mars Exploration Rover Spirit is so dusty that the rover almost blends into the dusty background. Image credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/Cornell

(PhysOrg.com) -- NASA's Mars Exploration Rover Spirit communicated via the Mars Odyssey orbiter today right at the time when ground controllers had told it to, prompting shouts of "She's talking!" among the rover team at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif.

"This means Spirit has not gone into a fault condition and is still being controlled by sequences we send from the ground," said John Callas of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif., project manager for Spirit and its twin, Opportunity.

The solar-powered rover still has low energy, a condition worsened by a dust storm in recent days. Today's communication confirmed that Spirit

had received commands sent on Tuesday and that the battery charge had not fallen low enough to trigger a pre-programmed fault mode.

Callas said, "The baby is crying, which means it is healthy enough to communicate normally. Now we are analyzing the data we've received to determine what the next commands should be, but this is all good news."

Spirit has been operating on Mars for nearly five years in an exploration mission originally planned to last three months. The recent dust storm is clearing, but a coating of dust on Spirit's solar panels is reducing the rover's ability to generate electricity even when the sky is clear.

Provided by NASA

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