

NASA clears Atlantis for Monday launch to Hubble

May 10 2009, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer



STS-125 Commander Scott Altman waves to photographers before boarding one of the Shuttle Training Aircraft early Saturday May 9, 2009 at the Kennedy Space Center's Shuttle Landing Facility in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Seven astronauts are making final preparation for their 12-day mission on the space shuttle Atlantis that includes the fifth and final servicing of the Hubble Space Telescope. (AP Photo/Chris O'Meara)

(AP) -- After months of delay, NASA cleared space shuttle Atlantis for a Monday launch to the Hubble Space Telescope.

Mission managers concluded Saturday that Atlantis is ready to take off on the long-awaited Hubble repair mission, the fifth and final one. Shuttle Endeavour is also in good shape at the other [launch](#) pad; it's on standby in case Atlantis is damaged during the flight and its seven astronauts need to be rescued.

Weather forecasters gave good odds for launching Atlantis: 80 percent. What's more, things were looking more encouraging at the emergency landing site in Spain, where only a slight chance of rain is expected Monday. Liftoff time is just after 2 p.m.

Atlantis' crew will perform five spacewalks on consecutive days to install new cameras and equipment at Hubble, and to repair some broken science instruments.

The mission had been scheduled for last October, but a critical failure at the orbiting observatory put everything on hold.

"Atlantis has been on the ground for a while, so that team is really anxious to fly. Hopefully, we'll do that Monday," said launch director Mike Leinbach.

Astronauts last visited Hubble in 2002. NASA wants to replace some of the telescope's old parts - like batteries and gyroscopes - so it will keep beaming back breathtaking views of the cosmos for another five to 10 years. Scientists expect those pictures to be even more spectacular - and go even further back in time - with the addition of new science instruments going up on Atlantis.

Altogether, the mission is costing NASA just over \$1 billion.

On the Net:

NASA: <http://www.nasa.gov/mission-pages/shuttle/main/index.html>

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