

Rocket readied at Kazakh steppe for ISS mission

September 28 2009, By PETER LEONARD , Associated Press Writer



The Russian Soyuz TMA-16 booster rocket that will carry the three-man crew to the international space station is installed at the launch pad of the Russian-leased Baikonur Cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Monday, Sept. 28, 2009. U.S. astronaut Jeffrey Williams, Russian cosmonaut Maxim Surayev, and Canadian billionaire Guy Laliberte are set to blast off for the international space station from the Baikonur Cosmodrome on Sept. 30, 2009. (AP Photo/Mikhail Metzel)

(AP) -- Workers at Russia's manned space-launch facility lifted to the launch pad on Monday a rocket that is to send Cirque du Soleil founder Guy Laliberte and two astronauts to the International Space Station.

The gleaming white [Soyuz rocket](#) and capsule moved at a walking pace across the Kazakh steppe aboard a train taking it from its assembly building to the [launch pad](#) known as Gagarin's Start. It is the spot from which the Soviet Union sent off Yuri Gagarin in 1961 to become the

first human in orbital space flight.

Dozens of family members, friends and space agency officials gathered outside the assembly building shortly before daybreak to watch the start of the trip to the launch pad.

Among them was Laliberte's girlfriend, model Claudia Barilla, who said, "He's doing it for fun, but it's more to realize a childhood dream."

Laliberte is paying some \$35 million for a seat on the Soyuz and 12 days aboard the ISS. He's likely to be the last paying private traveler to the station for the next few years, because the United States is soon to scuttle its [space shuttle](#) program, leaving Russian spacecraft the only way to get to and from the ISS.

The 50-year-old Canadian plans to use some of his showman's flair to make the trip a memorable chapter of "space tourism," including taking along red clown noses for the crew. But he says there's also a serious side to the trip, including a planned presentation from the ISS to raise awareness about world water supply problems.

Also flying with Laliberte when the [rocket](#) blasts off Wednesday for the two-day trip to the ISS will be astronauts Maxim Surayev of Russia and American Jeffrey Williams.

Williams, 51, is traveling to the ISS for his third time, while 37-year old Surayev will be making his maiden spaceflight.

Laliberte only signed up for the spaceflight earlier this year, after a place unexpectedly freed up, but his transition into the team of astronauts appears to have been smooth.

"They have really gelled, even though they have only been training with

Guy for about a couple of weeks," said Williams' wife, Anna-Marie. "They feel very solid as a crew."

Laliberte returns to Earth next month with Russian cosmonaut Gennady Padalka and U.S. astronaut Michael Barratt, who have been at the space station since March.

Alexander Vorobyov, a spokesman for the Russian space agency Roscosmos, meanwhile hinted at a slim possibility of future opportunities for private space travel.

"Currently, there are no clear prospects for [space](#) tourism, but it all depends on the Americans," Vorobyov said. "The heads of NASA and Roscosmos are due to meet (Wednesday), so we cannot make any calls on this just yet."

©2009 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Rocket readied at Kazakh steppe for ISS mission (2009, September 28) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-09-rocket-readied-kazakh-steppe-iss.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--