

SpaceX looking to launch next Dragon spacecraft - to the ISS

December 14 2010, By Jason Rhian



SpaceX has gathered a long string of successes since its founding in 2002. Photo Credit: Alan Walters/awaltersphoto.com

With the success of the first and second launches of the Falcon 9 rocket as well as the successful recovery of the Dragon spacecraft, Space Exploration Technologies (SpaceX) has stated its intent to accelerate the pace of the Commercial Orbital Transportation Services (COTS) program that the private space firm has with NASA. The company has been inspecting various elements of the Dragon spacecraft that launched to orbit on Dec. 8, to make potential changes to the next Dragon – in preparation for its flight.

The company became the first private organization in history to launch a vehicle into orbit and then have it successfully return safely to Earth. The company has, for some time, been working to step up the pace of

the COTS program. Under this program the first three flights of the Dragon would be demonstration flights with the third, and final demonstration flight docking with the International Space Station (ISS).

SpaceX is, if anything, a young and restless company, a company on the move and as such they want to combine the mission requirements of the second and third flights – into one. In short, SpaceX is hoping to send their next Dragon – to the space station itself, cutting out one demonstration flight in the process. However, while officials at SpaceX and the company's CEO and CTO Elon Musk are attempting to relive the golden age of manned spaceflight (this effort is somewhat similar to the accelerated launch of the Apollo 8 mission) – [NASA](#) appears uncertain about speeding up the process. NASA has stated that if all went well with the first flight of the Dragon that it would consider speeding up the program.

The next flight of the Dragon [spacecraft](#) could take place as soon as the middle of next year. According to Musk, there are few differences between the maneuvers that Dragon conducted on Orbit this past Wednesday – and those that would be required if the craft were to rendezvous with the ISS. For a mission to the orbiting outpost, the Dragon would need to be equipped with solar arrays and certain equipment on board the craft would need to be upgraded.

To date, NASA has only stated that it is assessing the possibility of accelerating the program and that it recognizes the successes that [SpaceX](#) has enjoyed. Those within the space community note that NASA has a risk-averse philosophy and that the agency will likely want to see the company complete the requirements of the initial contract and fully demonstrate the Dragon's capabilities.

Source: [Universe Today](#)

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