

Deep space capsule comes alive with first weld

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Construction on the first space-bound Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Module began with the first weld at the Michoud Assembly Facility on Sept. 9, 2011. This capsule will be used during Orion's first test flight in space. After welding is completed at Michoud, the Orion spacecraft orbital test article will be shipped to NASA's Kennedy Space Center, where the heat shield will be installed. At Kennedy, it will undergo final assembly and checkout operations for eventual flight. Credit: NASA

(PhysOrg.com) -- Construction began this week on the first new NASA spacecraft built to take humans to orbit since space shuttle Endeavour left the factory in 1991, and marked a significant milestone in carrying out the ambitious exploration vision President Obama and Congress have laid out for the nation.

Engineers at NASA's Michoud Assembly Facility in New Orleans started welding together the first space-bound Orion Multi-Purpose Crew Vehicle. "The Orion team has maintained a steady focus on progress, and we now are beginning to build hardware for spaceflight," said Orion Program Manager Mark Geyer, NASA's Johnson Space Center, Houston.

"This marks a major milestone in NASA's ambitious plans to send humans farther into space than the nation has ever been before," said NASA spokesman David Weaver, Headquarters, Washington. "We're not only working to send people into deep space, we are putting people to work right here in America."

The first welds were completed Friday using an innovative new friction stir welding process, developed especially for Orion construction. The process creates a seamless, leak-proof bond that has proven stronger and higher in quality than can be achieved with conventional welding.

After welding is completed at Michoud, the [Orion spacecraft](#) orbital test article will be shipped to NASA's [Kennedy Space Center](#) in Florida, where the [heat shield](#) will be installed. At Kennedy, it will undergo final assembly and checkout operations for flight.

Provided by JPL/NASA

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