

Soyuz rocket launches on mission to space station

July 15 2012, by DMITRY LOVETSKY



The Soyuz-FG rocket booster with Soyuz TMA-05M space ship carrying a new crew to the International Space Station, ISS, flies in the sky at the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Sunday, July 15, 2012. The Russian rocket carries Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko, U.S. astronaut Sunita Williams and Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide. (AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky)

A Russian Soyuz craft launched into the morning skies over Kazakhstan on Sunday, carrying three astronauts on their way to the International Space Station, where they will quickly start preparing for a frenzy of incoming traffic.

NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, [Russian cosmonaut](#) Yury Malenchenko and Japan's Akihito Hoshide are set to travel two days before reaching their three colleagues already at the permanent space outpost.

Families and colleagues watched the launch from an observation platform in the Russian-leased cosmodrome in the dry southern steppes of this sprawling Central Asian nation.

Liftoff took place at the exact scheduled time of 08:40 a.m. local time (0240 GMT), sending a deafening roar as the craft gained height.

Despite withstanding intense G-force pressure, the three astronauts looked relaxed in televised footage as they performed a series of routine operations.



The Soyuz-FG rocket booster with Soyuz TMA-05M space ship carrying a new crew to the International Space Station, ISS, blasts off from the Russian leased Baikonur cosmodrome, Kazakhstan, Sunday, July 15, 2012. The Russian rocket carries Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko, U.S. astronaut Sunita Williams and Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide. (AP Photo/Dmitry Lovetsky)

The Soyuz jettisoned three [rocket booster](#) stages as it was propelled into orbit, which takes just over nine minutes.

At that stage, a doll given to Malenchenko as a mascot by his daughter and suspended over the three astronauts floated out of view on television footage, indicating the craft had escaped the earth's gravitational pull.

The shell that surrounds the capsule during the launch phase also peeled away, soaking the astronauts in bright yellow sunshine pouring through the viewing hatches.

The [solar arrays](#) that deployed on the Soyuz after orbital entry will provide the craft with the power it needs during its two-day trip.

Williams, tightly squeezed into the cramped craft, gave a thumbs-up sign and waved to onboard cameras as [Russian space agency](#) chief Vladimir Popovkin congratulated the crew over radio control.

Malenchenko, who is piloting the Soyuz, is one of Russia's most experienced astronauts and is making his fifth voyage into space.



Russian cosmonaut Yuri Malenchenko, center, U.S. astronaut Sunita Williams, above, and Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide, crew members of the mission to the International Space Station, ISS, gesture prior to the launch of the Soyuz-FG rocket at the Russian leased Baikonur Cosmodrome, in Kazakhstan, Sunday, July

15, 2012. (AP Photo/Vyacheslav Oseledko, Pool)

Williams, who was born in Euclid, Ohio, and raised in Massachusetts, is on her second mission and will further extend the record for the longest sojourn in space for a female astronaut. The 46-year old astronaut, who is of Indian-American heritage, spent 195 days at the space station in 2006-2007.

Sunday's launch took place on the 37th anniversary of the landmark Apollo-Soyuz mission during which crafts from the United States and the Soviet Union docked in space, setting a precedent for scientific cooperation between the Cold War foes.

Williams said in a press conference ahead of the launch that the test mission laid the ground for a long-standing friendship and collaboration in the space program.

The Soyuz is schedule to dock Tuesday with the space station at 08:52 a.m. Moscow time (0452 GMT).



U.S. astronaut Sunita Williams, right, and Japanese astronaut Akihiko Hoshide, crew members of the mission to the International Space Station, ISS, walk to the rocket prior to the launch of the Soyuz-FG at the Russian leased Baikonur

cosmodrome, in Kazakhstan, Sunday, July 15, 2012. (AP Photo/Vyacheslav Oseledko, Pool)

Russians Gennady Padalka and Sergei Revin and U.S. astronaut Joseph Acaba, who make up the crew of Expedition 32, have been working at the space station since mid-May.

The space station, which orbits up to 410 kilometers (255 miles) above the earth, is braced to handle an unprecedented level of traffic.

Japan's HTV3 cargo ship will dock with the [space station](#) next week and will be the first of nine craft making contact with the orbiting satellite over a 17-day span.

Expeditions 32 and the incoming Expedition 33 have 33 experiments planned for their stay at the orbiting laboratory.

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