

Russia tests faster space docking route

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A Russian Soyuz (left) and Progress spacecraft are docked at the International Space Station (ISS), March 2012. An unmanned Russian cargo ship docked with the ISS in a record time, officials said, taking just under six hours from launch to complete the journey.

An unmanned Russian cargo ship docked with the International Space Station (ISS) in a record time, officials said Thursday, taking just under six hours from launch to complete the journey.

In the past, the journey has taken two days.

While the test flight was with an unmanned cargo spacecraft, if the new docking technique proves reliable it will dramatically cut the amount of time cosmonauts spend aboard the [Soyuz spacecraft](#) on their way to the space station.

The Progress M-16M, loaded with more than 2,600 kilogrammes of fuel, oxygen and other supplies linked up with the ISS at 05:18 am Moscow time (0118 GMT).

A Soyuz-U rocket carrying the cargo vessel had blasted into space from the [Baikonur cosmodrome](#) at 23:35 pm Wednesday (1935 GMT).

"The docking between the cargo ship and the ISS was performed according to a four-orbit scheme for the first time in history," said the Russian Mission Control Centre.

Mission control spokeswoman Natalia Biketova said a cargo ship had been used in this case, as the procedure was still in the test phase.

Thursday's smooth docking is a much-needed boost to the Russian space programme, which has been beset by a slew of technical problems over the past year.

During that period, Russia has lost half a dozen satellites and a Progress cargo vessel bound for the ISS.

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