

Japan's new rocket blasts off in laptop-controlled launch

September 14 2013



Guests watch a live transmission of the launch of Japan's new solid-fuel rocket on a screen at the Uchinoura Space Centre in Kagoshima, Japan on September 14, 2013.

Japan's new solid-fuel rocket successfully blasted off Saturday carrying a telescope for remote observation of planets in a launch coordinated from a laptop computer-based command centre.

The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) launched the Epsilon rocket from the Uchinoura Space Centre in Kagoshima, southwestern Japan, at 2:00 pm (0500 GMT).

Spectators cheered in Kagoshima as well as at a public viewing site in Tokyo.

More than 900 people who gathered at the Tokyo event clapped and took photos with cellphones as a huge screen showed the rocket lift off in a cloud of white smoke and orange flame.

The three-stage Epsilon—24 metres (79-feet) long and weighing 91 tonnes—released the "SPRINT-A" telescope at an altitude of about 1,000 kilometres (620 miles) as scheduled, JAXA said.

SPRINT-A is the world's first space telescope for remote observation of planets including Venus, Mars and Jupiter from its orbit around Earth, according to the agency.

Lift-off had originally been scheduled for August 27 but the first attempt was suspended with just seconds to go after a ground control computer falsely detected a positional abnormality.

Japan hopes the rocket, launched with just two laptop computers in a pared-down command centre, will become competitive in the global space business.



Japan's new solid-fuel rocket launches at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's Uchinoura Space Center in Kagoshima prefecture, Japan on September 14, 2013.

The Epsilon is about half the size of the nation's liquid-fuelled H2-A rocket, and a successor to the [solid fuel](#) M-5 rocket that was retired in 2006 due to its high cost.

The small-sized rocket is equipped with [artificial intelligence](#) "for the first time in the world" that allows autonomous launch checks by the rocket itself, JAXA has said.

At the control centre only eight workers were engaged in the launch operation, compared with some 150 people usually needed when Japan launches its mainstream H2-A rocket.

The agency has halved the production and [launch](#) costs to 3.8 billion yen (\$37 million) compared with the previous M-5 rocket.

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