

# Elon Musk to unveil spacecraft to ferry astronauts (Update)

May 29 2014

---



In this Saturday, March 9, 2013, file photo, SpaceX CEO Elon Musk gives the opening keynote at the SXSW Interactive in Austin, Texas. Musk is set to unveil a new spacecraft designed to carry astronauts on Thursday, May 29, 2014, in Hawthorne, Calif. SpaceX is one of several private companies vying to develop a manned craft to replace NASA's retired space shuttle fleet. (AP Photo/Jack Plunkett, File)

SpaceX, which has flown unmanned cargo capsules to the International Space Station, planned to unveil a spacecraft Thursday designed to ferry astronauts to low-Earth orbit.

The California-based rocket builder, founded by billionaire Elon Musk, is one of several private companies vying to develop "space taxis" for the U.S. space agency to replace its retired space shuttle fleet.

In a NASA briefing with reporters last year, Musk said the manned version would look futuristic, like an "alien spaceship" with side-mounted thrusters, landing legs that pop out and large windows for astronauts to marvel at Earth's curvature.

Since the shuttle fleet retired in 2011, NASA has depended on Russian rockets to transport astronauts to orbit and back, paying nearly \$71 million per seat. The space agency has said it wants U.S. companies to fill the void by 2017 and has given out seed money to spur innovation.

SpaceX—short for Space Exploration Technologies Corp.—has made four cargo runs to the orbiting outpost. Just last month, its Dragon capsule splashed into the Pacific, returning nearly 2 tons of science experiments and old equipment.

Companies competing for the right to ferry station astronauts need to design a spacecraft that can seat a crew of seven and be equipped with life support systems and an escape hatch in case of emergency.

SpaceX and longtime NASA contractor Boeing Co. are "more or less neck and neck" in the competition, but there's a long way to go before astronauts can rocket out of the atmosphere on private spacecraft, said John Logsdon, professor emeritus of political science and international affairs at George Washington University.

Logsdon said progress by private companies is slower than anticipated mainly because Congress has not fully funded NASA's budget request for the effort. He said it's important for the U.S. to wean its reliance on Russia given the political tension over Russia's recent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

"It's essential to have our own capability to transport people to space," he said. "This is an important step in that direction."

**More information:** [Five things to know about SpaceX's flight plans](#)

© 2014 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Elon Musk to unveil spacecraft to ferry astronauts (Update) (2014, May 29) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-05-elon-musk-unveil-spacecraft-ferry.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.