

Virgin spacecraft prototype soars over Mojave, testing re-entry system

October 10 2014, by Elizabeth Howell



Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo lands after its 54th test flight on Oct. 7, 2014.
Credit: Scaled Composites / Jason DiVenere

Virgin Galactic has finished yet another stepping-stone to its first commercial spaceflight. The New Mexico-based company sent SpaceShipTwo aloft on a test of the re-entry system Oct. 7, making a safe landing at the Mojave Air and Space Port.

The company is among a handful of firms competing to bring well-heeled tourists into suborbital [space](#). There are more than 700 people signed up to take a flight on SpaceShipTwo, with tickets running at \$250,000 per seat. The [spacecraft](#) is put into the air using a carrier aircraft called WhiteKnightTwo, then separates for a brief flight in space. Exact timing for the first flight has not been disclosed yet, but it is expected to be in the coming months.

"SpaceShipTwo is safely back on the ground after her 54th test flight, including her tenth test of the feather system," wrote Virgin Galactic in a tweet yesterday (Oct. 7). "Coupled with several good, full duration ground tests of SS2's rocket motor in recent weeks, today's flight brings spaceflight closer."

It's been a long road to space for Virgin Galactic, which last week commemorated the 10th anniversary of the predecessor prototype spacecraft (SpaceShipOne) making a second [flight](#) into suborbital space Oct. 4, 2004, to win the Ansari X-Prize—the anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's first human spaceflight in 1961.

The spacecraft was built by Scaled Composites and today is on display at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. Scaled Composites founder Burt Rutan subsequently designed SpaceShipTwo, but has since retired.

Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson has pushed back the first [spaceflight](#) of the new spacecraft several times over the years. In recent statements he has said he was hoping the spacecraft would be ready early next year, but in an NBC news report from last week he simply said SpaceShipTwo is "on the verge" of starting flights.



Feathered Flight during Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo's third powered flight on January 10, 2014, over the Mojave desert. This image was taken by MARS Scientific as part of the Mobile Aerospace Reconnaissance System optical tracking system.

Source: [Universe Today](#)

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