

European space plane splashes down on schedule: ESA

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The European Space Agency's Intermediate eXperimental Vehicle is transported on January 30, 2015 ahead its launch in French Guiana

Europe's prototype [space plane](#) splashed down in the Pacific on schedule Wednesday after a 100-minute flight to test key re-entry technologies, the European Space Agency (ESA) said.

"The mission has come to an end according to plan... it couldn't have

been better," ESA Director General Jean-Jacques Dordain said in a live webcast.

Mission officials cheered and hugged each other at the success.

Dubbed the Intermediate eXperimental Vehicle (IXV), the craft marks the first step in Europe's strategy to join an elite club of nations able to launch spacecraft and return them safely to Earth.

It is an innovative wingless wedge shape, designed to cope with the stress of re-entry and glide to a pre-determined site.

The maiden mission saw the car-sized IXV launched from ESA's base in French Guiana and head eastwards on a sub-orbital path before splashing down about 3,000 kilometers (1,800 miles) west of the Galapagos Island.

It was to be picked up by crane by a recovery ship.

"The [mission](#) is not yet over because now it's going to be necessary to analyse all of the data that was collected throughout the flight," said Dordain.

"The data analysis part of the work is to begin soon. It will be hard work, but it will move the frontiers of knowledge further back concerning aerodynamics, thermal issues, guidance and navigation."

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