

Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin to launch from Cape Canaveral this decade (Update)

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Blue Origin head Jeff Bezos, seen in Santa Monica, California, on September 6, 2012, said the aerospace company is working on a US-made BE-4 rocket engine

The commercial space race got a little more crowded Tuesday when the aerospace company Blue Origin, headed by Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos, said it will begin launching from Cape Canaveral, Florida, later this decade.

After losing a bid in 2013 to lease a historic launch pad—where US

moon missions lifted off in the 1960s and 1970s—to rival SpaceX, Blue Origin announced it would make its home nearby at the NASA center's launch complex 36, and rename it "Exploration Park."

"Today we are thrilled to be coming to the Sunshine State for a new era of exploration," Bezos told a press conference.

He said 145 launches "thundered into space from here," including the Mariner missions which were the first US spacecrafts to visit other planets; Pioneer 10, the first spacecraft to travel through the asteroid belt; and Surveyor 1, the first US spacecraft to land softly on the moon.

"The pad has stood silent for more than 10 years. Too long. We can't wait to fix that," Bezos said.

"We will be launching from here later this decade."

The arrival of Blue Origin to the area known as Florida's Space Coast was expected to bring \$200 million in investment to the area and create 330 jobs, according to governor Rick Scott, who congratulated Bezos for his success and gave the billionaire a "business ambassador" award.

Though Bezos revealed few details about Blue Origin's flight plans, he said there would be a "21st century production facility where we will focus on manufacturing a reusable fleet of orbital launchers."



Jeff Bezos, the founder of Blue Origin and Amazon.com, appears at a press conference to announce the new BE-4 rocket engine with Tory Bruno, CEO of United Launch Alliance, at the National Press Club, September 17, 2014 in Washington, DC

He also said a vehicle assembly building would be located near the launch pad in order to make it easier to "process and transport really big rockets."

He said the company is working on a US-made BE-4 rocket engine that would undergo tests at the pad, and that the BE-4 would eventually power United Launch Alliance's Vulcan rocket.

New Shepard

Blue Origin's New Shepard spacecraft is built to fly just to the edge of

space, in sub-orbit, and the company is working on a future launch system to send as many as six astronauts to orbit at a time.

New Shepard made a successful demonstration flight from Texas in April, reaching about 58 miles (93 kilometers) high, just short of the boundary between Earth and space which lies at 62 miles above Earth.

Blue Origin joins a host of other companies that have installed themselves at Cape Canaveral, home to Kennedy Space Center on Florida's Atlantic coast.

SpaceX, which made history as the first private company to send cargo to the International Space Station, blasts off its Falcon 9 rockets from launch pad 39A, the same spot from which the Apollo missions to the moon departed.

Headed by Internet tycoon Elon Musk, the cofounder of PayPal, SpaceX is also racing Boeing to be the first to send astronauts to space aboard a crew version of the California-based company's Dragon capsule.

Boeing, meanwhile, announced earlier this month it is building its crew capsule, the Starliner (formerly known as CST-100) in a hangar at Kennedy Space Center where the space shuttles used to be kept for maintenance and service.

United Launch Alliance, a joint venture of Lockheed Martin and Boeing, launches its Atlas V rockets from launch complex 41.

Among a pool of commercial space competitors, Boeing and SpaceX have received the most seed money from NASA to get astronauts into space by late 2017 or early 2018.

The retirement of the space shuttle program in 2011 left the United

States reliant on Russia's Soyuz space capsules for transport to the International Space Station, at a cost of nearly \$81 million per seat, according to NASA administrator Charles Bolden.

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