

John Glenn honored with launch of space station supply ship

April 18 2017, by Marcia Dunn



A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket that will carry supplies to the International Space Station lifts off from complex 41 at the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Tuesday, April 18, 2017, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

John Glenn's trailblazing legacy took flight Tuesday as a cargo ship bearing his name rocketed toward the International Space Station.

An Atlas rocket provided the late morning lift to orbit, just as it did for Glenn 55 years ago.

The commercial cargo ship, dubbed the S.S. John Glenn, holds nearly 7,700 pounds (3,500 kilograms) of food, equipment and research for the space station. It's due there Saturday, two days after the arrival of two fresh astronauts.

NASA's shipper, Orbital ATK, asked Glenn's widow, Annie, for permission to use his name for the spacecraft, following his December death.

Glenn, an original Mercury 7 astronaut, became the first American to orbit the Earth in 1962. He launched again in 1998 aboard shuttle Discovery at age 77, the oldest person ever in space. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery two weeks ago.

"It is clearly a chance one more time to show John Glenn's name emblazoned in space," said Frank Culbertson, a former astronaut who now heads Orbital ATK's space systems group.

Glenn was a courageous, pioneering leader who always promoted space and set a good example, Culbertson noted. "And I hope that putting his name on the space station is an inspiration to the next generation to aspire to do similar things, push the boundaries," he said.



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Besides supplies, the capsule contains a banner showing Glenn in his orange space shuttle launch suit—it's the first thing the station astronauts will see when they open the craft—as well as memorabilia for his family. Because the launch was delayed a month by hydraulic problems at the pad and on the rocket, no Glenn family members were able to make it to

Cape Canaveral, according to Culbertson.

Orbital ATK—one of NASA's prime delivery services for the space station, along with SpaceX—normally uses its own Virginia-based Antares rockets to launch its Cygnus cargo ships, named after the swan constellation. But it opted for the United Launch Alliance's bigger Atlas V rocket in order to carry up a heftier load. A new, larger greenhouse is flying up, along with equipment needed for a spacewalk next month.

"Looks like we nailed the orbit once again," said Vern Thorp, a manager for the rocket maker.

NASA's 360-degree video streaming of the launch—the first such attempt for a live broadcast—didn't go as well. Something went wrong moments before liftoff, and the video skipped over the actual rising of the rocket from the pad. NASA said it would try again, perhaps on an upcoming SpaceX delivery mission.



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Mission Control beamed up the launch broadcast for the three astronauts at the space station, which is orbiting 250 miles (about 400 kilometers) high. The American, Russian and Frenchman will be joined Thursday by another American and Russian who will take off from Kazakhstan.

SpaceX and Boeing are developing new capsules that could fly U.S. astronauts to the space station as early as next year. Boeing's Starliner capsule will fly on the Atlas V.

It was the last launch commentary for NASA spokesman George Diller, who is retiring next month after 37 years. His was the voice at liftoff for the final space shuttle flight, by Atlantis, in 2011, as well as the send-off of the Hubble Space Telescope in 1990 and all five Hubble-servicing missions—hundreds of rocket launches in all.

"We're really, really going to miss hearing your golden voice on console during launch, George," said Kennedy Space Center's director, Robert Cabana, patting him on the back.



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Diller said his time at the space agency has been a "heck of a ride."

"I couldn't do better if I'd been riding a rocket."



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More information: NASA:
www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/station/main/index.html

Orbital ATK: www.orbitalatk.com/

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