

# SpaceX launches AI robot, strong coffee for station crew

June 29 2018, by Marcia Dunn

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A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket's exhaust plume is illuminated during a launch just before dawn Friday, June 29, 2018 at Launch Complex 40 at Cape Canaveral, Fla. The used Falcon rocket blasted off before dawn, hauling nearly 6,000 pounds (2,700 kilograms) of cargo, including the spherical AI bot named Cimon; genetically identical mice, or mousetronauts; and super-caffeinated coffee for the crew of the International Space Station. The shipment, packed into a Dragon capsule that's also recycled, should reach the station Monday. (Malcolm Denmark/Orlando Sentinel via AP)

A SpaceX rocket that flew just two months ago with a NASA satellite roared back into action Friday, launching the first orbiting robot with artificial intelligence and other station supplies.

The used Falcon rocket blasted off before dawn, hauling nearly 6,000 pounds (2,700 kilograms) of cargo including the spherical AI bot named Cimon, genetically identical mice and super-caffeinated coffee for the crew of the International Space Station.

The shipment—packed into a Dragon capsule that's also recycled—should reach the station Monday.

It was an especially gorgeous launch, delighting spectators as the rocket plume expanded in the clear night sky like a giant halo beneath a nearly full moon and a gleaming Mars.

SpaceX's Jessica Jensen described the high-altitude plume, illuminated against the dark sky, as "the space jellyfish that's coming down after us."

"I was going to say breathtaking, but maybe awakening might be a better word," said NASA's space station program manager, Kirk Shireman.

This marked SpaceX's fastest reflight of a booster. The same first-stage booster launched the planet-hunting Tess satellite in April. The capsule, meanwhile, flew in 2016.

Aiming to lower launch costs by reusing rockets, SpaceX did not retrieve the booster for another flight and ditched it in the Atlantic instead. The company is switching to a new and improved line of boosters.



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The space station and its six inhabitants were sailing 250 miles (400 kilometers) above the South Pacific when the Falcon 9 took off.

The Dragon will deliver the robot Cimon, pronounced Simon. Slightly bigger than a basketball, the round, 3D-printed German Space Agency robot will assist German astronaut Alexander Gerst with science experiments. IBM provided the AI brain. Cimon will remain indefinitely on the orbiting lab.

Cimon stands for Crew Interactive Mobile Companion. The name also refers to the genius doctor in the science fiction tale "Captain Future."

Also on board are two sets of genetically identical brown female mice, or 20 mousetronauts altogether. Northwestern University researchers want to study the bacteria in the animals' guts and compare them to their identical sisters on the ground. They did the same with former NASA astronauts and identical twins Scott and Mark Kelly, during Scott's yearlong space station mission a few years ago.



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Groceries include ice cream bars, fresh blueberries from Texas, home to Mission Control, and 60 freeze-dried packets of Death Wish Coffee from New York state. A former NASA astronaut helped arrange the java delivery for the space station's Serena Aunon-Chancellor, a coffee lover.

"We like to keep our astronauts super-caffeinated because they work harder then," Shireman joked after liftoff.

New food—especially treats—is "a huge psychological benefit" when you're stuck with a space menu that repeats every eight or nine days, Shireman said. "The crew's going to be opening up and eating blueberries, drinking coffee and eating ice cream, I'm sure, before you know it."



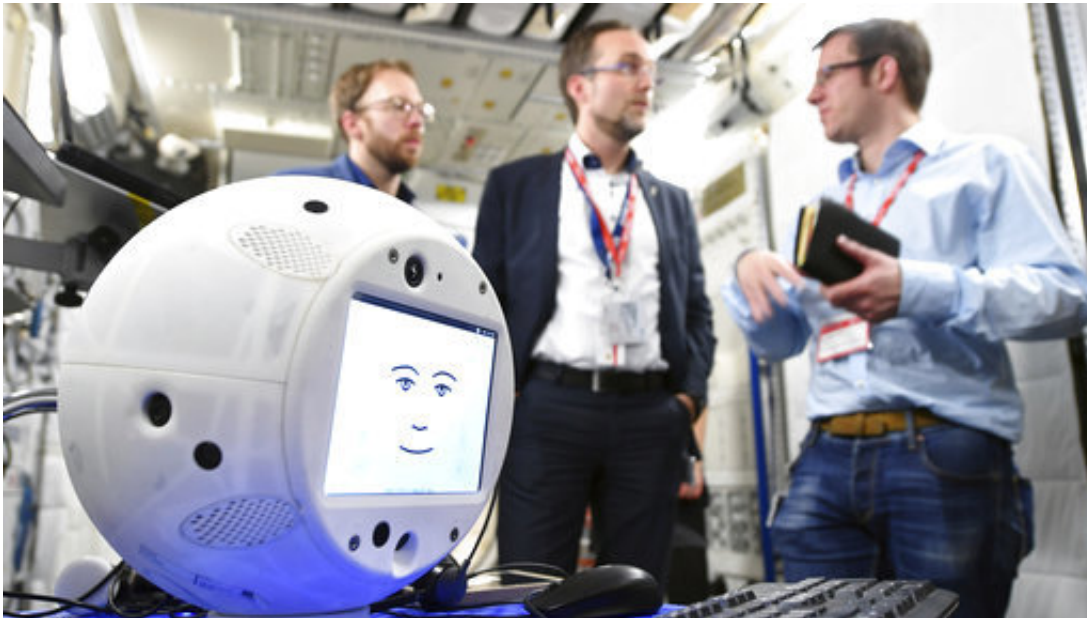
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In this image made from video, the Falcon 9 rocket carrying the SpaceX CRS-15 Dragon launches from Cape Canaveral, Florida, to the international space station, Friday, June 29, 2018. (NASA via AP)



In this image made from video, the Falcon 9 rocket carrying the SpaceX CRS-15 Dragon prepares to launch from Cape Canaveral, Florida, to the international space station, Friday, June 29, 2018. (NASA via AP)



This Jan. 30, 2018 photo provided by the German Aerospace Center shows the "Cimon" (Crew Interactive MOBILE companion) robot during a communications test at the ESA European Astronaut Center in Cologne-Porz, Germany. The round, artificial intelligence robot is part of SpaceX's latest delivery to the International Space Station. Liftoff is set for early Friday, June 29, 2018, from Cape Canaveral, Fla. In the background from left are project leaders Christian Karrasch, Till Eisenberg and Christoph Kossel. (T. Bourry/ESA/DLR via AP)

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