

Former astronaut helps break flight record over poles

July 11 2019, by Marcia Dunn

A former astronaut is back at NASA's Kennedy Space Center after helping to shatter a pair of records for a round-the-world airplane flight over the North and South poles.

Terry Virts was part of the team whose 46-hour, 39-minute and 38-second polar circumnavigation flight ended Thursday where it began. They set the duration and speed records in a Qatar Executive Gulfstream G650ER aircraft. Their [average speed](#) was 535 mph (861 kph).

Dubbed "One More Orbit," the flight paid homage to next week's 50th anniversary of humanity's [first moon landing](#).

Virts' former space station crewmate, Russian Gennady Padalka, was on the first two legs of the flight. Padalka, the world's space champ with 879 days in orbit, left during a fueling stop. Virts says the fueling stops were "NASCAR pit-stop intense."

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Citation: Former astronaut helps break flight record over poles (2019, July 11) retrieved 16 July 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2019-07-astronaut-flight-poles.html>

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