

# Virgin Orbit conducts drop-test of rocket from Boeing 747

July 10 2019, by John Antczak

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In this photo provided by Virgin Orbit, a rocket is dropped from a Boeing 747 airplane flying above Edwards Air Force Base in California, Wednesday, July 10, 2019. The "drop test," which did not involve firing the rocket motor, was part of a test of Virgin Orbit's air-launched satellite booster, and is considered to be a key step toward space missions. (Greg Robinson/Virgin Orbit via AP)

Virgin Galactic's sister company Virgin Orbit conducted a drop test of

its air-launched satellite booster over California on Wednesday, a key step toward space missions.

The 70-foot (21.3-meter) LauncherOne rocket was released from a Boeing 747 flying 35,000 feet (10,668 meters) over an Edwards Air Force Base test range in the Mojave Desert.

The purpose of the test was to observe how the rocket detached from the 747's wing and its free-fall to the desert floor before the first actual orbital launch later this year.

The test did not involve the ignition of the rocket motor.

"The release was extremely smooth, and the rocket fell away nicely," Chief Test Pilot Kelly Latimer said.

Virgin Orbit CEO Dan Hart said it was "a monumental step forward" for the project. "It's the capstone to a thorough development program not just for a rocket, but for our carrier aircraft, our ground support equipment, and all of our flight procedures," he said in a statement.

The Long Beach, California-based company founded by Richard Branson will use the system to launch small satellites—weighing from about 660 to 1,100 pounds (300 to 500 kilograms)—into space.

The 747—named Cosmic Girl—will fly from multiple locations around the globe, enabling access to orbits that are more difficult to reach from fixed launch sites.



In this photo provided by Virgin Orbit, a rocket is shown attached to the wing of a Boeing 747 airplane on the tarmac of the Mojave Air and Space Port in Mojave, Calif, Wednesday, July 10, 2019, prior to a test flight during which the rocket was released from the airplane. The "drop test," which did not involve firing the rocket motor, was part of a test of Virgin Orbit's air-launched satellite booster, and is considered to be a key step toward space missions. (Greg Robinson/Virgin Orbit via AP)

Virgin Orbit recently announced an agreement with ANA Holdings, parent of All Nippon Airways, to bring its service to Japan.

The memorandum of understanding calls for ANA to evaluate its capability to provide ground support, maintenance and possibly aircraft.

Virgin Orbit plans its initial launch missions to fly out of Mojave Air

and Space Port in the California desert.

Other sites may include Kennedy Space Center in Florida, Andersen Air Force Base on Guam, the United Kingdom's Spaceport Cornwall and the Taranto-Grottaglie Airport in Italy.

Virgin Galactic, meanwhile, is moving personnel from Mojave, where it developed its space tourism rocket plane, to Spaceport America in southern New Mexico in preparation for commercial operations.

Virgin Galactic this week announced a merger with Social Capital Hedosophia and plans to go public.

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