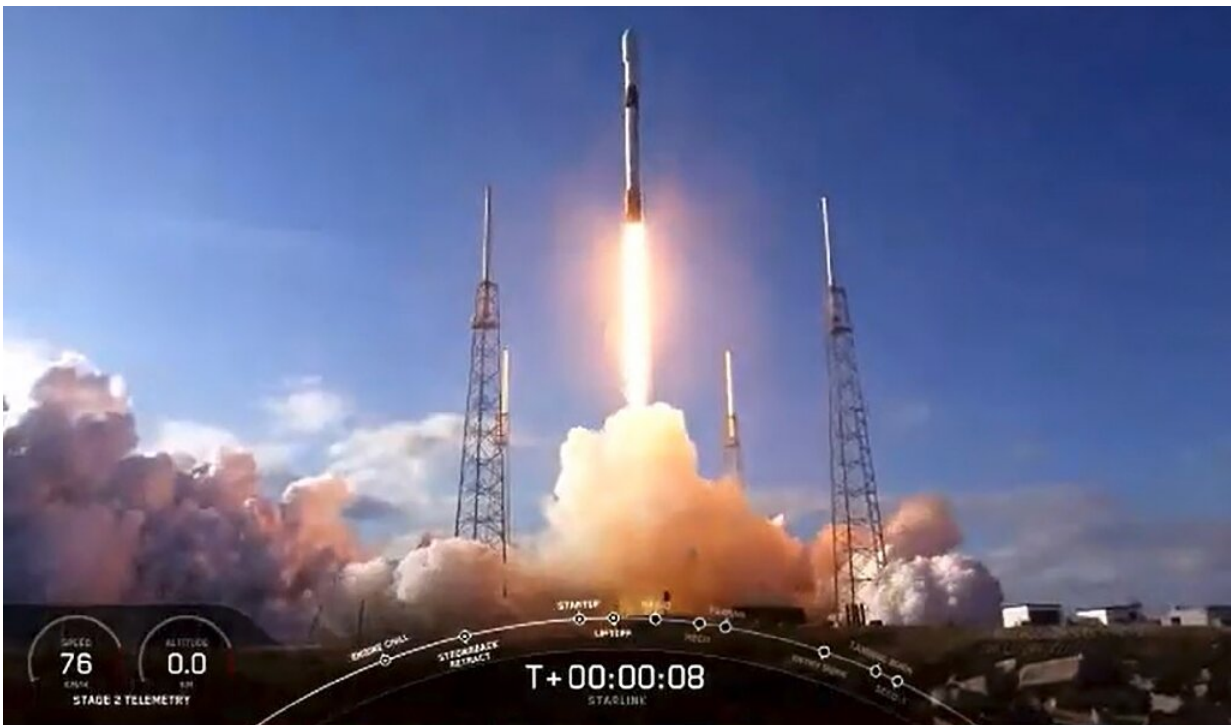


NASA announces first SpaceX crewed flight for May 27

April 17 2020, by Ivan Couronne



NASA will send two American astronauts to the International Space Station in May aboard a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket

A SpaceX rocket will send two American astronauts to the International Space Station on May 27, NASA announced on Friday, the first crewed spaceflight from the US in nearly a decade.

"On May 27, @NASA will once again launch American astronauts on American rockets from American soil!" Jim Bridenstine, head of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, said in a tweet

Since July 2011, the United States has relied on Russian Soyuz rockets to send American astronauts to the ISS.

The US space agency had been aiming to conduct the crewed mission in May and is sticking with the plan despite the global coronavirus pandemic.

Astronauts Robert Behnken and Douglas Hurley will fly to the ISS on a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket aboard a Crew Dragon spacecraft also built by SpaceX, the company founded by tech entrepreneur Elon Musk.

They will lift off at 4:32 pm (2032 GMT) on May 27 from historic launch pad 39A, the same one used for the Apollo and space shuttle missions, at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida, NASA said.

Behnken and Hurley have been training for years for the mission, which would move the United States closer to no longer being reliant on Russia for crewed flights.

The Crew Dragon capsule is a modified version of SpaceX's Dragon capsule which has been used to send supplies to the ISS since 2012.



SpaceX founder Elon Musk (2nd L) addresses the media alongside NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine (L), and astronauts Doug Hurley (2nd R) and Bob Behnken (R)

It will take approximately 24 hours after liftoff for them to dock with the ISS. The length of their stay aboard the ISS has not been determined.

One American astronaut and two Russian cosmonauts are currently aboard the ISS.

The May mission will be a milestone for NASA, which has had trouble turning the page on the space shuttle era. Shuttles transported American astronauts into space for three decades but two of them also blew up.

After abandoning the shuttle, NASA turned to private industry to develop its next generation spacecraft and SpaceX and Boeing have been competing on rolling out a crewed capsule.

SpaceX came up with Crew Dragon and Boeing the Starliner but the Starliner suffered a setback in December during a test run.

SpaceX is now poised to become the first private company to send astronauts into space.

In March, Musk's Crew Dragon capsule made a round trip to the ISS, which is in orbit more than 250 miles (400 kilometers) above Earth, with a mannequin on board, before returning to the Atlantic after six days in space.

SpaceX has made the trip 15 times since 2012, but only to refuel the station.

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