

Dragon-riding astronauts join exclusive inner circle at NASA

May 30 2020, by Marcia Dunn



This combination of undated photos made available by SpaceX shows NASA astronauts Doug Hurley, left, and Bob Behnken in their spacesuits at SpaceX headquarters in Hawthorne, Calif. On Wednesday, May 27, 2020, They are scheduled to board a SpaceX Dragon capsule atop a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket and, equipment and weather permitting, shoot into space. It will be the first astronaut launch from NASA's Kennedy Space Center since the last shuttle flight in 2011. (SpaceX via AP)

Astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken join NASA's exclusive inner circle by catching a ride on a SpaceX rocket and capsule.

It's only the fifth time that NASA has put people aboard a brand new spacecraft line for liftoff. And it's the first time the spacecraft belongs to a for-profit company in charge of the launch.

Their destination is the International Space Station, where they'll spend one to four months before guiding their capsule to a splashdown in the Atlantic.

Meet NASA's first commercial crew:

DOUG HURLEY, spacecraft commander:

The retired Marine colonel and former fighter pilot flew on NASA's last [space](#) shuttle [flight](#) in 2011, closing out a 30-year era. He was tapped in 2015 as one of four NASA [astronauts](#) assigned to fly the first commercial crew capsules under development by SpaceX and Boeing. He drew the SpaceX Dragon.

Hurley, 53, served as pilot on both of his shuttle missions, the No. 2 spot. He's now serving as spacecraft commander, overseeing the most dangerous parts of the Dragon's flight: launch, reentry and ocean recovery.

He grew up in Apalachin, New York, and, after earning an engineering degree, devoted his career to the Marines and attended test pilot school. NASA chose him as an astronaut in 2000.



NASA astronauts Douglas Hurley, left, and Robert Behnken walk outside the Neil A. Armstrong Operations and Checkout Building, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., Wednesday, May 27, 2020. The two astronauts will fly on a SpaceX test flight to the International Space Station. For the first time in nearly a decade, astronauts will blast into orbit aboard an American rocket from American soil, a first for a private company. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

Wife Karen Nyberg, a former space station resident, retired two months ago from NASA. She, too, was a member of the Astronaut Class of 2000. Their son, Jack, is 10.

BOB BEHNKEN, joint operations commander:

The Air Force colonel and former flight test engineer has six spacewalks to his credit and may rack up more during his space station stay. As joint operations commander, he'll oversee the Dragon's rendezvous and docking with the International Space Station. He'll also manage many of the activities while the capsule is there, including any possible spacewalks for [station](#) maintenance.

While growing up in St. Ann, Missouri, Behnken was mesmerized by photos of Jupiter and Saturn streaming from NASA's Voyager [spacecraft](#) . He studied physics and mechanical engineering in college, earning a doctorate in the latter.



In this image provided by NASA, astronauts Robert Behnken, right, and Douglas Hurley, left, walk out of the Neil A. Armstrong Operations and Checkout Building on their way to Launch Complex 39A as preparations continue for

NASA's SpaceX Demo-2 mission, Saturday, May 30, 2020, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Despite more storms in the forecast, SpaceX pressed ahead Saturday in its historic attempt to launch astronauts for NASA, a first by a private company. (Bill Ingalls/NASA via AP)



In this image provided by NASA, astronaut Douglas Hurley waves as he walks out of the Neil A. Armstrong Operations and Checkout Building on his way to Launch Complex 39A as preparations continue for NASA's SpaceX Demo-2 mission, Saturday, May 30, 2020, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Despite more storms in the forecast, SpaceX pressed ahead Saturday in its historic attempt to launch astronauts for NASA, a first by a private company. (Bill Ingalls/NASA via AP)

Behnken had risen to chief astronaut after a pair of shuttle flights when, in 2015, he was assigned to one of the first commercial crew flights. He teamed up with Hurley in 2018 on the SpaceX Dragon.

Behnken was also in the Astronaut Class of 2000. And also like Hurley, he married a fellow classmate: astronaut Megan McArthur, who flew on NASA's final mission to the Hubble Space Telescope. Their son, Theodore, is 6.

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