

Virgin Galactic plans 1st New Mexico space launch this month

November 6 2020, by John Antczak



In this Feb. 13, 2020, file photo, Virgin Galactic's VSS Unity departs Mojave Air & Space Port in Mojave, Calif. for the final time as Virgin Galactic shifts its SpaceFlight operations to New Mexico. Virgin Galactic said Thursday, Nov. 5, 2020, it expects to launch its first test spaceflight from New Mexico between Nov. 19-23. "This will be the first-ever human spaceflight conducted from New Mexico," Chief Executive Officer Michael Colglazier said in a statement. (Matt Hartman via AP, File)

Virgin Galactic said Thursday that it expects to launch its first manned test flight into space from New Mexico this month.

The company's spacecraft, VSS Unity, conducted two previous test spaceflights from Mojave, California, before moving in to its facilities at Spaceport America in New Mexico. Testing there has included unpowered glide flights and now the spaceflight planned between Nov. 19 and 23.

The spaceport will be Virgin Galactic's base for launching passengers on brief trips high above the Earth, starting with billionaire founder Richard Branson next year. The [company](#) did not announce a specific date for that event.

Unity is designed to be carried aloft beneath a special carrier jet and released at high altitude, where its [rocket engine](#) is ignited.

The suborbital flights are designed to send the craft to an altitude of at least 50 miles (80 kilometers) before it descends and glides to a landing on a runway.

In addition to passengers, Unity can carry small science experiments and will do so on this month's [flight](#), generating some revenue through a NASA program.

Virgin Galactic also has made progress on a second spaceship in its planned fleet and plans to roll it out during the first quarter of 2021, CEO Michael Colglazier said in a statement.

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