

Timing of next Virgin Galactic flight still up in the air

February 12 2021, by Susan Montoya Bryan

Virgin Galactic on Friday put off plans to make another attempt at a rocket-powered flight from New Mexico to the fringe of space, saying it needed more time for technical checks.

The space tourism venture said in a social media post that its team at Spaceport America would be working to identify the next opportunity to move the testing program along as the promise of commercial flights continues to loom.

The last attempt in December was cut short when computer trouble prevented the spaceship's rocket from firing properly. Instead of soaring toward space, the ship and its two pilots were forced to make an immediate landing by gliding back down to the runway at the desert outpost in southern New Mexico.

Over the past week, preparations for the latest attempt included [installing the rocket motor into the spacecraft](#) and checking the operation of a feathering system that slows and stabilizes the craft as it re-enters the atmosphere.

The spacecraft also was secured to the carrier plane that will fly it to a high altitude, where it will be released so it can fire its rocket motor and make the final push to space.

The flights are designed to reach an altitude of at least 50 miles (80.5 kilometers) before the rocket motor is turned off and the crew prepares

to reenter the atmosphere and glide to a landing.

Preparations for the next flight also included loading payload belonging to NASA aboard the six-passenger ship.

While the flight window for the test would have opened Saturday, Virgin Galactic has said there will be opportunities to fly throughout February pending its readiness and weather conditions. A storm system is expected to move across New Mexico this weekend, bringing with it frigid temperatures and snow in many locations.

Virgin Galactic has reached space twice before—the first time from California in December 2018. In June, Virgin Galactic marked its second successful glide flight over Spaceport America.

The company has yet to announce a firm date for its first commercial flight.

Virgin Galactic is one of a few companies looking to cash in on customers with an interest in space. Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin company in January [launched a new capsule as part of test](#) as it aims to get its program for tourists, scientists and professional astronauts off the ground.

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