

Astronauts arrive at pad for SpaceX flight on used rocket

April 23 2021, by Marcia Dunn



A SpaceX rocket with the company's Dragon capsule is illuminated by spotlights on the launch pad, early Friday, April 23, 2021, at NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. SpaceX aimed to launch its third crew a little before sunrise Friday, this time using a recycled capsule and rocket. The four astronauts, representing the U.S., Japan and France, were supposed to fly to the International Space Station on Thursday. But liftoff was delayed because of poor weather offshore. (Joel Kowsky/NASA via AP)

Four astronauts arrived at their launch pad early Friday morning for a SpaceX flight to the International Space Station, the company's third bon voyage for a NASA crew in under a year.

The two Americans, one French and one Japanese astronaut climbed into white gull-winged Teslas for the ride to their rocket, all courtesy of Elon Musk's companies. Musk met with the astronauts before they headed to the pad, wishing them well from a safe social distance.

SpaceX aimed for a split-second liftoff at 5:49 a.m., an hour before sunrise. Good weather was forecast, not only at NASA's Kennedy Space Center but all the way up the East Coast in the event of a launch abort and emergency splashdown. Poor offshore weather prompted SpaceX to skip Thursday's attempt.

For the first time, SpaceX was using a recycled Falcon rocket and Dragon capsule for a crew launch. The capsule soared on the company's first astronaut launch last May, and the rocket hoisted the second crew in November.

Spacecraft commander Shane Kimbrough and his crew will replace that second set of astronauts, who will return to Earth next Wednesday in their own SpaceX capsule.

Joining Kimbrough for a six-month space station mission: NASA's Megan McArthur, France's Thomas Pesquet and Japan's Akihiko Hoshide. All have flown in space before.



NASA acting administrator Steve Jurczyk, center, and SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk, right, arrive for the walkout of the SpaceX crew before a launch attempt Friday, April 23, 2021, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Four astronauts will fly on the SpaceX Crew mission to the International Space Station scheduled for launch on April 23, 2021. (AP Photo/John Raoux)



Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Akihiko Hoshide smiles as he talks to family and friends after leaving the operations and checkout building before a launch attempt Friday, April 23, 2021, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Four astronauts will fly on the SpaceX Crew mission to the International Space Station scheduled for launch on April 23, 2021. (AP Photo/John Raoux)



NASA acting administrator Steve Jurczyk, left and SpaceX founder and CEO Elon Musk arrive for the walkout of the SpaceX crew before a launch attempt Friday, April 23, 2021, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Four astronauts will fly on the SpaceX Crew mission to the International Space Station scheduled for launch on April 23, 2021. (AP Photo/John Raoux)



SpaceX astronauts, from left, NASA astronaut Megan McArthur, European Space Agency astronaut Thomas Pesquet, NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough, Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Akihiko Hoshide, leave the operations and checkout building for a trip to the launch pad Friday, April 23, 2021, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Four astronauts will fly on the SpaceX Crew mission to the International Space Station scheduled for launch on April 23, 2021. (AP Photo/John Raoux)



Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Akihiko Hoshide waves to family and friends after leaving the operations and checkuot building before a launch attempt Friday, April 23, 2021, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Four astronauts will fly on the SpaceX Crew mission to the International Space Station scheduled for launch on April 23, 2021. (AP Photo/John Raoux)



NASA astronaut Megan McArthur, right, and NASA astronaut Shane Kimbrough greet family members after leaving the operations and checkout building before a launch attempt Friday, April 23, 2021, at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla. Four astronauts will fly on the SpaceX Crew mission to the International Space Station scheduled for launch on April 23, 2021. (AP Photo/John Raoux)

McArthur had the same seat in the same capsule as her husband, Bob Behnken, did for SpaceX's debut crew flight. This time, he was the one huddling outside the Teslas with their 7-year-old son, saying goodbye. McArthur blew kisses and offered virtual hugs from a safe social distance.

The other astronauts' spouses and children also gathered alongside the

Teslas for photos and "love you's," as Musk and NASA's acting administrator, Steve Jurczyk, watched from afar. The crowd was kept to a minimum because of the pandemic.

SpaceX picked up the station slack for NASA after the agency's shuttles retired in 2011. SpaceX began supply runs the following year.

Boeing, NASA's other designated taxi service, isn't expect to launch astronauts until early next year.

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