

NASA astronauts arrive for Boeing's first human spaceflight

April 25 2024, by Marcia Dunn



NASA astronauts Butch Wilmore, right, and Suni Williams speak to the media after they arrived at the Kennedy Space Center, Thursday, April 25, 2024, in Cape Canaveral, Fla. The two test pilots will launch aboard Boeing's Starliner capsule atop an Atlas rocket to the International Space Station, scheduled for liftoff on May 6, 2024. Credit: AP Photo/Terry Renna

The two NASA astronauts assigned to Boeing's first human spaceflight arrived at their launch site Thursday, just over a week before their scheduled liftoff.

Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams will serve as test pilots for Boeing's Starliner capsule, which is making its debut with crew after years of delay. They flew from Houston into Kennedy Space Center on Thursday.

Due to blast off May 6 atop an Atlas rocket, the Starliner will fly to the International Space Station for a weeklong shakedown cruise. Boeing is trying to catch up to SpaceX, which has been launching astronauts for NASA since 2020.

No one was aboard Boeing's two previous Starliner test flights. The first, in 2019, didn't make it to the space station because of software and other problems. Boeing repeated the demo in 2022. More recently, the capsule was plagued by parachute issues and flammable tape that had to be removed.

Wilmore stressed this is a test flight meant to uncover anything amiss.

"Do we expect it to go perfectly? This is the first human flight of the spacecraft," he told reporters. "I'm sure we'll find things out. That's why we do this."

NASA hired SpaceX and Boeing a decade ago, paying billions of dollars for the companies to ferry astronauts to and from the space station. The space agency is still keen on having capsules from two competing companies for its astronauts, even with the space station winding down by 2030.



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"That's vitally important," Wilmore noted.

Wilmore and Williams will be the first astronauts to ride an Atlas rocket since NASA's Project Mercury in the early 1960s.

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