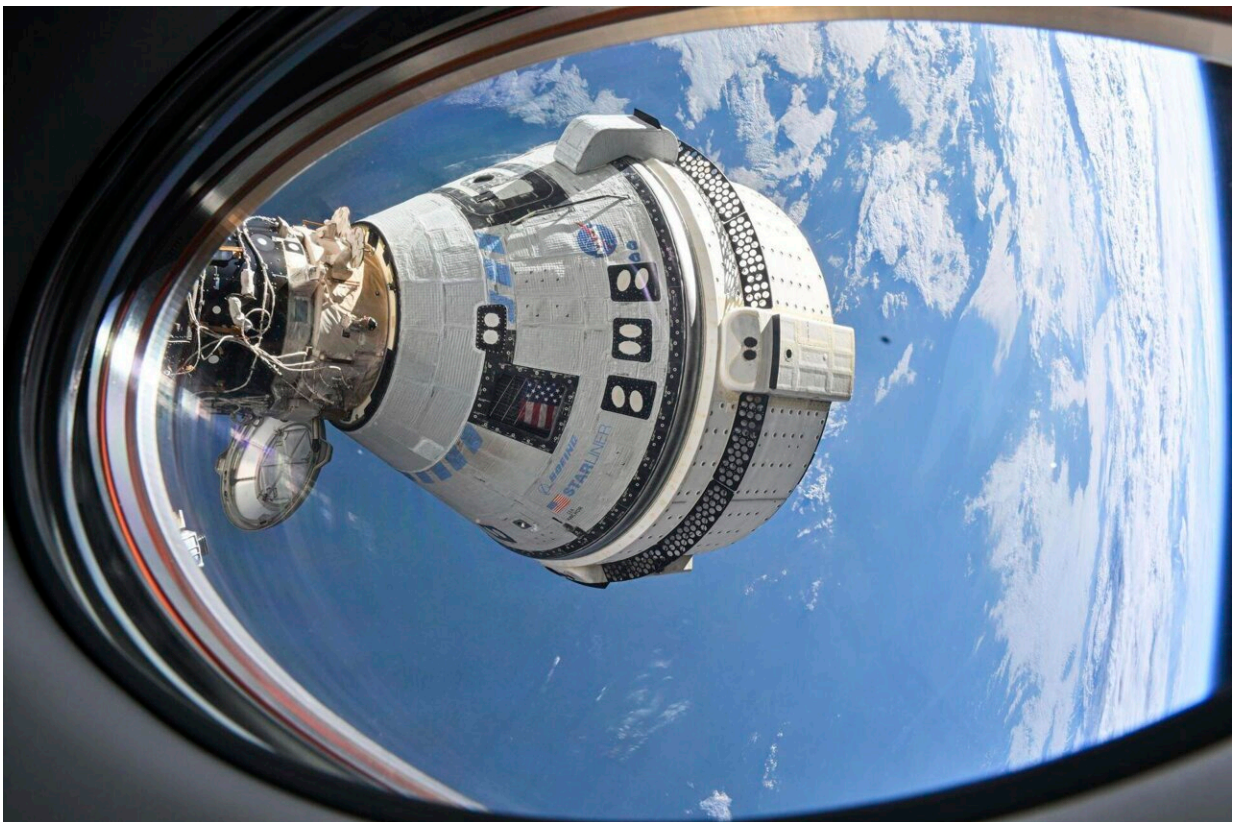


Boeing's beleaguered space capsule is heading back to Earth without two NASA astronauts

September 6 2024, by Marcia Dunn



This photo provided by NASA shows Boeing's Starliner spacecraft which launched astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams to the International Space Station docked to the Harmony module's forward port on July 3, 2024, seen from a window on the SpaceX Dragon Endeavour spacecraft docked to the adjacent port. Credit: NASA via AP

After months of turmoil over its safety, [Boeing's new astronaut capsule](#) is set to depart the International Space Station on Friday without its crew.

NASA's two [test pilots](#) will stay behind at the space station—their home until next year—as the [Starliner capsule](#) prepares to undock and aims for a touchdown six hours later in the New Mexico desert.

Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams should have flown Starliner back to Earth in June, a week after launching in it. But thruster failures and helium leaks marred their ride to the space station.

NASA ultimately decided it was too risky to return Wilmore and Williams on Starliner. So the capsule contains their empty seats and blue spacesuits along with some old station equipment. SpaceX will bring the duo back in late February, stretching their original eight-day mission to more than eight months.



NASA astronauts Suni Williams, left, and Butch Wilmore stand together for a photo enroute to the launch pad at Space Launch Complex 41 Wednesday, June 5, 2024, in Cape Canaveral, Fla., for their liftoff on the Boeing Starliner capsule to the international space station. Credit: AP Photo/Chris O'Meara, File



In this photo provided by NASA, astronauts Butch Wilmore, left, and Suni Williams inspect safety hardware aboard the International Space Station on Aug. 9, 2024. Credit: NASA via AP

Boeing's first astronaut flight caps a journey filled with delays and setbacks. After the space shuttles retired more than a decade ago, NASA hired Boeing and SpaceX for orbital taxi service. Boeing ran into so many problems on its first test flight with no one aboard in 2019 that it had to repeat it. The 2022 do-over uncovered even more flaws and the repair bill topped \$1 billion.

SpaceX's [crew](#) ferry flight later this month will be its 10th for NASA since 2020. The Dragon capsule will launch on the half-year expedition with only two astronauts since two seats are reserved for Wilmore and

Williams for the return leg.

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