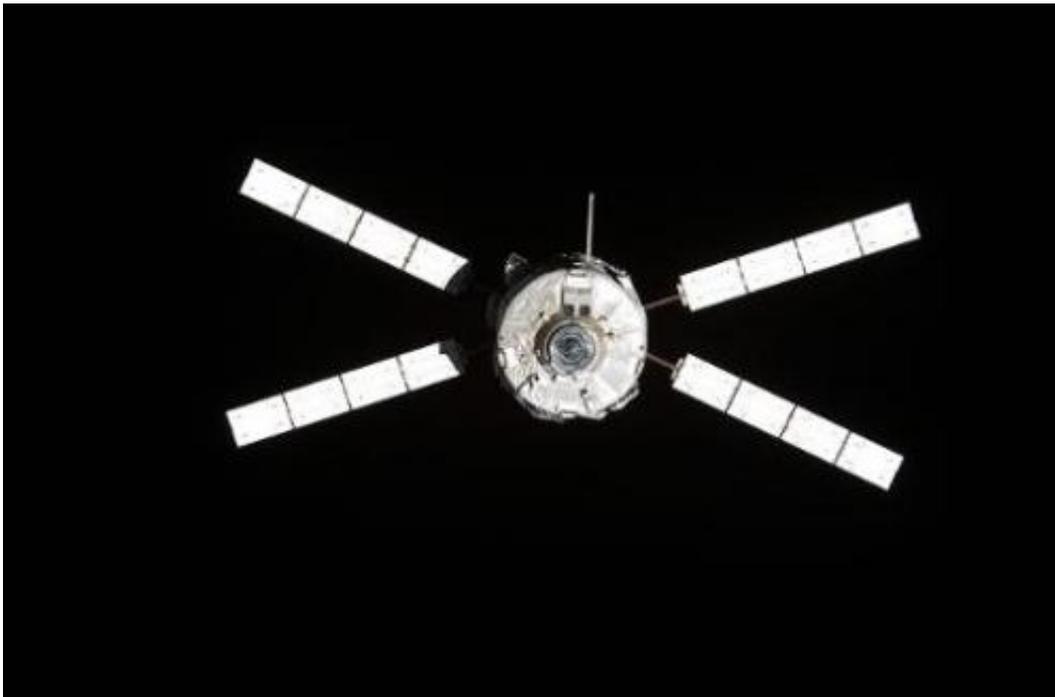


Last European space truck set for July 24 launch

June 26 2014



ESA's Jules Verne Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV) continuing its relative separation from the International Space Station on September 29, 2008

The last of five robot resupply ships Europe was scheduled to provide for the International Space Station will be taken aloft on July 24, launch firm Arianespace said on Thursday.

Known as an Automated Transfer Vehicle (ATV), the freighter will be launched from Kourou, French Guiana, at 10:41 pm on July 24 (0141

GMT on July 25), it said in a statement in Paris.

The European Space Agency (ESA) was contracted to provide five ATVs for the first phase of manned operations by the US-led orbital platform.

The size of a double-decker bus, the cylindrical ATV modules are launched by a heavy Ariane 5 ES rocket, and use onboard motors and starlight navigation to rendezvous and dock with the ISS.

They bring water, food, fuel, oxygen, experiments and treats for the crew and provide much-appreciated additional living space.

At the end of a mission usually lasting several months, they undock from the ISS and burn up in the atmosphere in a controlled de-orbit.

The fifth ship is named the George Lemaitre, after the Belgian cosmologist who fathered the concept of the Big Bang which created the Universe.

The previous four ATVs were rated as successful testbeds for automated space flight, and their technology is being eyed for future US manned missions.

After the last ATV flight, the ISS will continue to be resupplied by Russia's Progress freighter and by fledgling US private contractors.

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Citation: Last European space truck set for July 24 launch (2014, June 26) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-06-european-space-truck-july.html>

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