

Thaxted Astronomical Society

News

Features

NF0046

SpaceX Crew Complete

Final Rehearsal

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8351747/SpaceX-ready-launch-astronauts-space-time.html>

Elon Musk's SpaceX crew complete the final rehearsal for their historic mission - the first astronaut launch from Kennedy Space Center since the last shuttle flight in 2011

Daily Mail 24th May 2020 >

- **Robert Behnken, 49, and Douglas Hurley, 53, will man the capsule Wednesday**
- **They arrived at the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center in Florida wearing their SpaceX-designed spacesuits and in a Tesla with the license plate ISSBND**
- **They then climbed into their Crew Dragon spacecraft at Launch Complex 39A**

Elon Musk's SpaceX crew on Saturday completed the final rehearsal for their historic mission - the first astronaut launch from NASA's Kennedy Space Center since the last shuttle flight in 2011.

NASA astronauts Robert Behnken, 49, and Douglas Hurley, 53, both veteran space travelers, will crew the capsule, Hurley piloted Atlantis on its last trip.

The two astronauts performed their 'dress rehearsal' on Saturday, Hurley said. They arrived at the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center in Florida wearing their SpaceX-designed spacesuits and in a Tesla with the license plate ISSBND, ISS Bound.

They then climbed into their Crew Dragon spacecraft at Launch Complex 39A. SpaceX also successfully tested their Falcon 9 rocket Friday.

Behnken wrote on Twitter Friday: 'Exciting couple of days here at NASA Kennedy!

'Crew arrival in Florida was awesome, seeing our vehicle roll to 39A was epic, and watching our SpaceX Falcon 9 1st-stage fire one more time before our mission still has a smile on my face!'

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NASA astronauts Douglas Hurley, left, and Robert Behnken, wearing SpaceX spacesuits, are seen as they depart the Neil A. Armstrong Operations and Checkout Building for Launch Complex 39A during a dress rehearsal prior to the Demo-2 mission launch on Saturday



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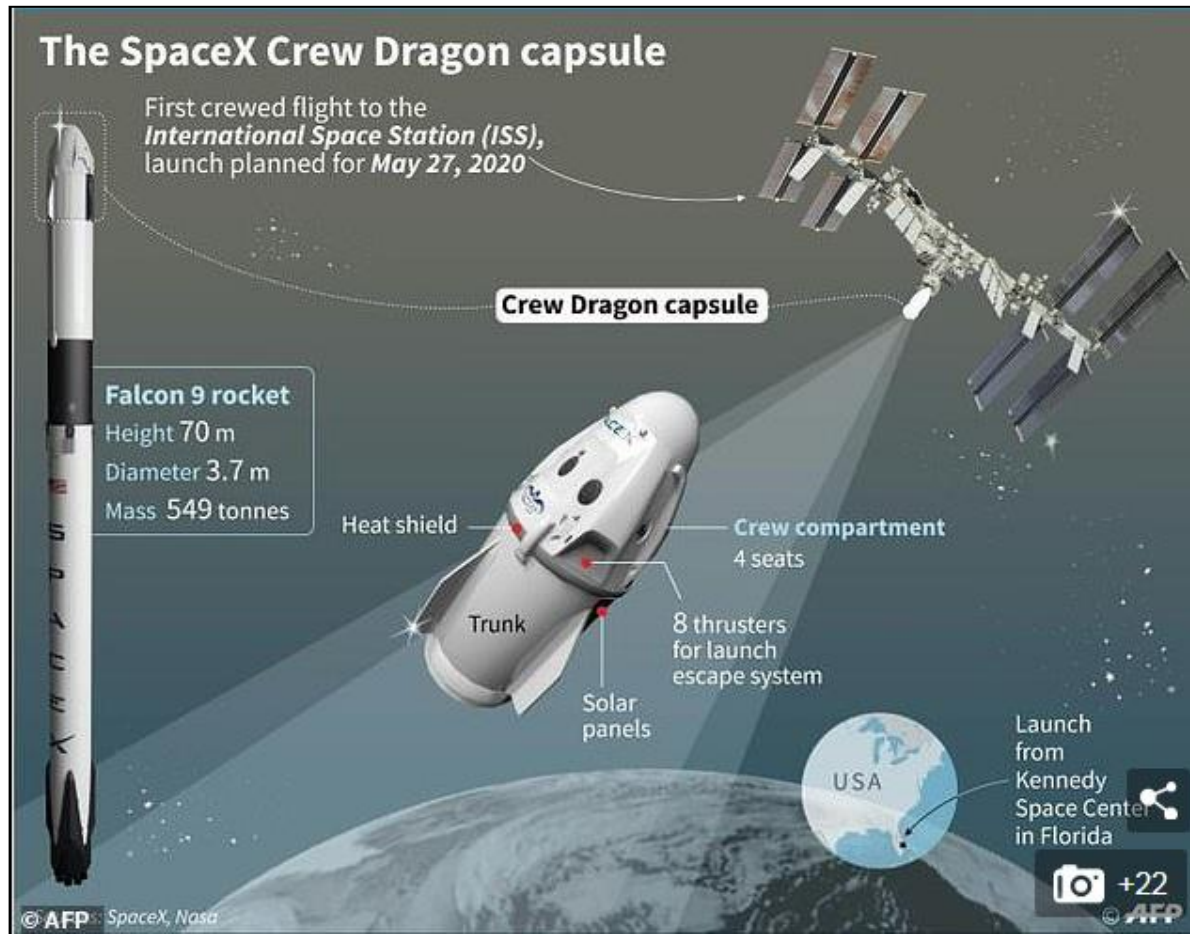
The rocket is set for a Wednesday, May 27, launch that will send two astronauts to the International Space Station for the first crewed flight from the U.S. in nearly a decade



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The SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule. Elon Musk's SpaceX is the conductor and NASA the customer as businesses begin chauffeuring astronauts to the International Space Station. With American shuttles no longer in use, the US has had to rely on Russia for rides to the station



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The Launch Pad 39A and the SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket with the Crew Dragon spacecraft on top of the rocket

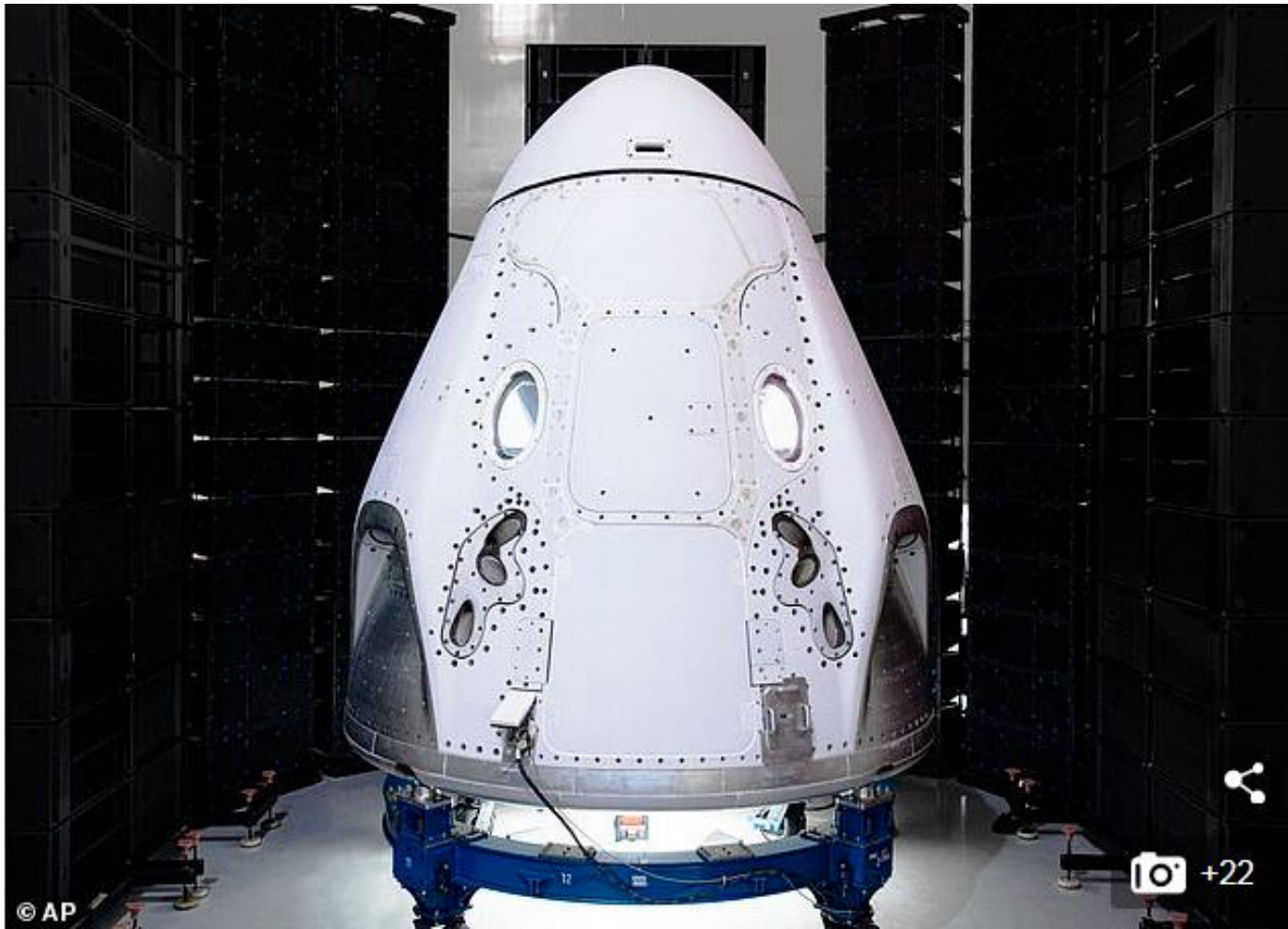


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The SpaceX Crew Dragon capsule after its arrival to the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral



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US President Donald Trump will be among the spectators at Kennedy Space Center in Florida Wednesday to witness the launch, which has been given the green light despite months of shutdowns due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The general public, in a nod to virus restrictions, has been told to watch via a livestream as Crew Dragon is launched by a Falcon 9 rocket toward the International Space Station.

Elon Musk's SpaceX is the conductor and NASA the customer as businesses begin chauffeuring astronauts to the International Space Station. With American shuttles no longer in use, the United States has had to rely on Russia for rides to the station.

They're scheduled to blast off at 4.33pm EDT from launch pad 39A, the same one the Apollo astronauts used to get to the moon.

NASA's Commercial Crew program, aimed at developing private spacecraft to transport American astronauts to space, began under Barack Obama.

But his successor sees it as a symbol of his strategy to reassert American domination of space, both military - with his creation of the Space Force - and civilian.

He has ordered NASA to return to the moon in 2024, an unlikely timetable but one that has given the storied space agency a boost.

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In the 22 years since the first components of the ISS were launched, only spacecraft developed by NASA and by the Russian space agency have carried crews there.

NASA used the illustrious shuttle program - huge, extremely complex, winged ships -to carried dozens of astronauts into space for three decades.

But their staggering cost - \$200 billion for 135 flights - and two fatal accidents finally put an end to the program.

The shift to private companies allows NASA to zero in on deep space travel. The space agency is working to return astronauts to the moon by 2024 under orders from the White House, but that deadline appears increasingly unlikely even as three newly chosen commercial teams rush to develop lunar landers. Mars also beckons.

The White House portrayed the launch as an extension of Trump's promise to reassert American dominance in space. He recently oversaw creation of the Space Force as the sixth branch of the armed forces.

'Our destiny, beyond the Earth, is not only a matter of national identity, but a matter of national security,' Trump said in a statement.

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The last shuttle, Atlantis, landed on July 21, 2011.

After, NASA astronauts learned Russian and traveled to the ISS in the Russian Soyuz rocket from Kazakhstan, in a partnership which survived political tensions between Washington and Moscow.

But it was only ever meant to be a temporary arrangement. NASA had entrusted two private companies - aviation giant Boeing and upstart SpaceX - with the task of designing and building capsules that would replace the shuttles.

Nine years later, SpaceX, founded by Musk, the outspoken South African entrepreneur who also built PayPal and Tesla, in 2002, is ready to launch.

At 4:33pm on Wednesday, a SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket is set to take off from Launch Pad 39A with the Crew Dragon capsule at its top.

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NASA has awarded SpaceX more than \$3 billion in contracts since 2011 to build the spacecraft.

The first astronauts launched by SpaceX are breaking new ground for style with hip spacesuits, gull-wing Teslas and a sleek rocketship - all of it white with black trim.

The color coordinating is thanks to Musk, the driving force behind both SpaceX and Tesla, and a big fan of flash and science fiction.

NASA astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken like the fresh new look. They'll catch a ride to the launch pad in a Tesla Model X electric car.

'It is really neat, and I think the biggest testament to that is my 10-year-old son telling me how cool I am now,' Hurley told The Associated Press.

'SpaceX has gone all out' on the capsule's appearance, he said. 'And they've worked equally as hard to make the innards and the displays and everything else in the vehicle work to perfection.'

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NASA has awarded SpaceX more than \$3 billion in contracts since 2011 to build the spacecraft.

Nineteen hours after takeoff the two men will dock at the ISS, where two Russians and an American are waiting for them.

The weather forecast remains unfavorable, with a 60 percent chance of bad conditions, according to Cape Canaveral forecasters.

The next launch window is Saturday, May 30.

The launch has taken five years longer than planned to come about, but even with the delays SpaceX has beaten Boeing to the punch.

Boeing's test flight of its Starliner failed due to serious software issues, and will have to be redone.

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On launch day, Hurley and Behnken will get ready inside Kennedy's remodeled crew quarters, which dates back to the two-man Gemini missions of the mid-1960s. SpaceX techs will help the astronauts into their one-piece, two-layer pressure suits.

Hurley and Behnken will emerge through the same double doors used on July 16, 1969, by Apollo 11's Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins - the Operations and Checkout Building now bears Armstrong's name.

But instead of the traditional Astrovan, the two will climb into the back seat of a Tesla Model X for the nine-mile ride to Launch Complex 39A, the same pad used by the moonmen and most shuttle crews. It's while they board the Tesla that they'll see their wives and young sons for the last time before flight.

Making a comeback after three decades is NASA's worm logo - wavy, futuristic-looking red letters spelling NASA, the 'A' resembling rocket nose cones. The worm adorns the Astro-Tesla, Falcon and even the astronauts' suits, along with NASA's original blue meatball-shaped logo.

The white-suited Hurley and Behnken will transfer from the white Tesla to the white Dragon atop the equally white Falcon 9.

'It's going to be quite a show,' Reed promised.

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Since 2012, SpaceX has been resupplying the ISS for NASA, thanks to the cargo version of the Dragon capsule.

The manned mission, called Demo-2, is crucial for Washington in two ways.

The first is to break NASA's dependence on the Russians.

But the second is to catalyze a private 'low Earth orbit' market open to tourists and businesses.

'We envision a day in the future where we have a dozen space stations in low Earth orbit. All operated by commercial industry,' said NASA boss Jim Bridenstine.

Musk is aiming higher: he is building a huge rocket, Starship, to circumnavigate the Moon - or even to travel to Mars and ultimately make humanity a 'multi-planet species'.

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***** Blast Off *****

Wed 27th May 2020

2130H UK Time