Delta II Launch Completes First Third of IRIDIUM® System

The first Delta II launch by Boeing since the merger with McDonnell Douglas placed five satellites in space today completing one-third of the IRIDIUM® communications system constellation.

Today's successful launch brings the total of orbiting IRIDIUM satellites to 22, one-third of the planned 66-satellite network. The Delta II lifted off from Space Launch Complex 2 at 5:38 p.m. PDT, placing the satellites into precise orbits. Engineers coordinated the placement of the satellites launched today with 17 satellites already in orbit and the planned orbits of the final 44.

"We are pleased to have a new partner in Boeing and delighted with the result of their first launch," said Edward F. Staiano, IRIDIUM LLC chief executive officer and vice chairman. "As our primary launch provider, Boeing will play a major role in the buildout of our satellite constellation."

The IRIDIUM system will provide a satellite-based wireless personal communications network permitting any type of telephone transmission to reach its destination virtually anywhere on Earth, at any time. Unlike most of today's communications systems that transmit a signal from Earth to a satellite and back to Earth, the IRIDIUM system will relay a signal from satellite to satellite to a receiver on another part of the globe.

This was the third time in 1997 that Delta II lifted five IRIDIUM satellites into orbit and the fifth successful launch this year. There are six more Delta II launches scheduled this year including a NASA scientific mission scheduled for Aug. 25, from Cape Canaveral Air Station, Fla.

Boeing builds the 124-foot-high Delta II 7920 rocket at Huntington Beach, while its Canoga Park facility produces the Rocketdyne RS-27 first stage main engine. Final assembly takes place at the Boeing facility in Pueblo, Colo. Alliant Techsystems, Magna, Utah, builds graphite epoxy motors for boost assist. Aerojet, Sacramento, builds the second-stage engine, and Allied Signal, Teterboro, N.J., builds the guidance and flight control system.

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