Successful Delta II Launch Clears The Way For Delta III

In its first launch of the year a Boeing [NYSE: BA] Delta II rocket successfully placed a United Kingdom military communications satellite into orbit here today at 07:32:01 p.m. EST.

Matra Marconi Space built the satellite, Skynet 4D. It is the first of three spacecraft replacing the existing satellites in order to extend the Skynet 4 communications system. The Stage 2 satellite is an enhanced version of the existing Skynet 4 satellites and two similar NATO IV spacecraft. The new version incorporates steerable antennas for super-high-frequency spot-beam communications, increased power and greater anti-jamming capability.

"The first of the new generation of Skynet 4 satellites gives the UK Ministry of Defence the capability to reconfigure its tactical and strategic communications rapidly to satisfy the ever-changing requirements of its peace-keeping forces," said Nick Franks, managing director of Matra Marconi Space UK.

The Skynet 4D launch was the first from Pad 17B following completion of modifications to accommodate Delta III launches beginning this year, in addition to continuing to support Delta II launches.

Boeing modified the mobile service tower on Pad 17B to fit the geometry of both launch vehicles. Other work included modifying the launch decks and launch mount to accommodate the larger Delta III, and installing a new liquid hydrogen storage and supply system.

Delta III, the newest Boeing expendable launch vehicle, is scheduled to make its first flight this year. Designed and built specifically for the commercial market, Delta III provides launch customers more options for addressing payload requirements while maintaining the reliability of the Delta heritage.

"This launch is a great start to the busiest year in the Delta program's long history," said Jay Witzling, division director Delta II and Titan programs. "There are 17 more Delta launches this year, two of which are Delta III missions.

In the extremely competitive launch vehicle marketplace Delta rockets are the reliability standard for the industry. The Delta III will offer our customers more launch options built around a proven system." The Rocketdyne RS-27 engine, built by Boeing in Canoga Park, Calif., powers the first stage of the Delta III.

Matra Marconi Space is a joint-venture company formed by the LAGARDERE of France and the GEC of the UK. The Company is the leading European space company employing 4,800 people and had sales of more than $1.6B in 1996.

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For further information:
Boeing Communications
(714) 896-1301
Launch Hotline
(714) 896-4770
Alistair Scott
Matra Marconi Space
+44-1438-773698