Sea Launch Vessels To Depart Long Beach; Inaugural Launch Scheduled For March 26

With final preparations now complete, the two Sea Launch operating vessels and their crews will soon depart the Home Port for equatorial waters in the Pacific to conduct the international joint venture's first launch.

The launch will be the world's first commercial rocket launch from a floating platform at sea.

Sea Launch President Allen B. Ashby today announced that the inaugural launch will take place at 2:18 p.m. Pacific Standard Time on Friday, March 26, 1999. The site will be in the Pacific at 154 West at the equator -- about 1,400 miles south of Hawaii.

"This first launch marks the culmination of four years of intensive effort by the Sea Launch partners," Ashby said, "It brings us to the final step before Sea Launch begins full operations later this year as a cost-effective, reliable commercial launch service."

Departing for the ocean launch site will be the Odyssey, a self-propelled launch platform, and the Sea Launch Commander, a floating mission control center and rocket assembly factory. On board the Odyssey in an environmentally controlled hangar is a 200-foot long, flight-ready Sea Launch rocket, with demonstration payload.

"The launch of the demonstration payload will validate the operation of the entire Sea Launch system and simulate the commercial communications satellites that Sea Launch will begin launching later this year," Ashby added.

At the equatorial launch site, the Odyssey will be partially submerged for added stability. The rocket will be withdrawn from its hangar on the platform, lifted into a vertical position, fueled with kerosene and liquid oxygen, and launched. The fueling and launch will proceed by remote control from the Sea Launch Commander -- the Odyssey crew having transferred to the Commander and that vessel having moved three miles away.

Sea Launch combines the resources of the world's leading aerospace and maritime companies. Partners in the international consortium are: Boeing Commercial Space Company, Kent, Wash., (provides spacecraft integration and the payload fairings); Kvaerner Maritime a.s., of Oslo, Norway (the vessel builder); RSC Energia of Moscow, Russia (provides the upper stage and its integration with the launch vehicle); and KB Yuzhnoye/PO Yuzhmash of Ukraine (provides the first two stages of the launch vehicle).

Currently, Sea Launch has firm contracts for 16 launches.

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