Boeing Rocketdyne RS-68 First Flight Engine 'Go for Launch'

The first Rocketdyne RS-68 flight engine has completed its flight acceptance hot-fire test series at NASA's Stennis Space Center in Mississippi. The engine was developed by the Rocketdyne Propulsion & Power business of The Boeing Company [NYSE: BA] for the first-stage booster of the Boeing Delta IV family of launch vehicles. The Boeing Delta IV is part of the U.S. Air Force's Evolved Expendable Launch Vehicle (EELV) program. This test success paves the way toward its use on the first Delta IV EELV flight in early 2002.

The final test in a series of three was completed on June 23, with all test objectives met.

To date, the RS-68 program has accumulated more than 16,000 seconds of test time across the program.

"This is a major milestone in the RS-68 program," said Rocketdyne Vice President and General Manager Byron Wood. "The successful completion of acceptance testing for the first RS-68 flight engine confirms that this new powerplant has moved from the drawing board to the production line. That accomplishment is a huge testament to the imagination and hard work of the people who have brought the RS-68 to reality."

With the acceptance testing now concluded, the RS-68 flight engine will undergo final system checks and then be moved to the Delta IV assembly facility in Decatur, Alabama, where it will be mated with a Delta IV common booster core. From there, the vehicle will be shipped to Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, where it is expected to be launched in the spring of 2002.

"With successful completion of the RS-68 acceptance testing, and the first flight Delta IV common booster core and upper stage soon to receive final acceptance, anticipation for first flight is really building up," said R. Gale Schluter, vice president and general manager of Boeing Expendable Launch Systems. "I take great pride in our entire Delta IV EELV team in achieving these industry-first accomplishments."

Said RS-68 program manager and division director Rick Baily, "The RS-68 team is to be congratulated for reaching this crucial goal. Literally hundreds of team members have given their best to see this moment arrive. It's been the combined effort of designers, builders and test and analysis people that have finally brought us a new engine that will soon go to work for America's space program."

The RS-68 engine is a liquid hydrogen - liquid oxygen booster engine that generates 656,000 lbs. of thrust. It is the first new large, liquid-fueled rocket engine to enter production in the United States since Rocketdyne developed the Space Shuttle Main Engine in the late 1970s.

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