

Boeing Helps NASA Get to the Heart of Comets

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The Boeing Company has helped NASA with a first step toward penetrating the innermost secrets of comets as the Boeing Delta II 7425 rocket powered into the skies above Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla., sending NASA's Comet Nucleus Tour (CONTOUR) spacecraft into orbit.

Liftoff from Pad A at Space Launch Complex 17 was 2:47 a.m. EDT. Sixty-three minutes into flight, the Delta II safely placed CONTOUR in an elliptical Earth orbit, where it will remain until mission operators put the spacecraft on a path toward at least two comets.

CONTOUR will study the nucleus of comets to further the scientific community's understanding of the characteristics and behavior of these objects.

"It was a great launch," said Kristen Walsh, Boeing director, NASA expendable Launch Vehicle program. "The Delta II deployed CONTOUR right on the mark. Everything went according to plan. You just can't ask for more."

This morning's launch marks the 101st successful Delta II mission. Its reliability rate is an impressive 98 percent.

The CONTOUR mission is a joint effort between Boeing, Huntington Beach, Calif., NASA's Kennedy Space Center, Fla., Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Md., and Cornell University, Ithaca, NY.

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