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"Opportunity," the second of two NASA rovers that will land on Mars, was launched today by a Boeing Delta II launch vehicle from Space Launch Complex 17B, Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla.

Liftoff occurred at 11:18:15 p.m. EDT. Approximately 80 minutes into the flight, "Opportunity," or Mars Exploration Rover (MER)-B, was deployed in its proper trajectory and is scheduled to land on Mars Jan. 25, 2004. The first rover "Spirit," or MER-A, launched on June 10 by a Delta II, is scheduled to land on Mars Jan. 4, 2004.

"Boeing takes great pride in the launching of the MER-B mission and the debut of the Delta II Heavy configuration. It is certainly a tribute to the government and industry team that made this mission successful," said Jay Witzling, vice president and deputy program manager, Boeing Delta programs.

"Opportunity" was launched aboard the new Delta II Heavy that features nine 46-inch diameter, stretched solid rocket boosters that provide increased lift performance to augment the Boeing Rocketdyne RS-27A main engine. The Delta II Heavy increases the performance of the Delta II by more than 20 percent to low-earth orbit.

"Spirit" and "Opportunity" will roam Mars and activate panoramic cameras to image Mars' surface and sky. Using precision instruments, the Rovers will examine samples of the terrain to help scientists determine if potential past water activity could have supported life on the Red Planet. Communication with scientists on Earth will be enhanced by the Mars Odyssey spacecraft as a relay station, which is orbiting Mars.

The next Delta launch for NASA will be the SIRTf (Space Infrared Telescope Facility) mission aboard a Delta II Heavy from Cape Canaveral in August.

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Boeing Delta website

Media Kit

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