Last of NASA's Great Observatories Launched by 300th Boeing Delta Rocket

Boeing today successfully launched NASA's Space Infrared Telescope Facility, or SIRTF, aboard a Delta II Heavy launch vehicle from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla.

Liftoff occurred on schedule at an instantaneous launch window of 1:35:39 a.m. EDT from Space Launch Complex 17B. Telemetry data indicated that the launch vehicle successfully deployed SIRTF to a solar orbit.

SIRTF is the last of NASA's Great Observatories program, which includes the Hubble Space Telescope, and the Chandra X-Ray and Compton Gamma Ray Observatories. SIRTF will enable researchers from around the world to learn more about the formation of the universe.

Today's launch for the Boeing Delta team commemorates 300 missions of a Delta rocket, spanning over four decades of launching spacecraft for government, commercial and civilian customers.

"Today's milestone launch reflects the efforts of thousands of dedicated people who have worked so hard on Delta over the past four decades. Our team has truly achieved an impressive accomplishment in Delta's history and the launch industry. We thank our NASA customer for their continued confidence in Delta to support important science missions such as SIRTF," said Jay Witzling, vice president and deputy program manager, Boeing Delta programs.

The original Delta rocket, launched in 1960, later evolved into the Delta II. Boeing then built the Delta III, which was used in part to help develop the Delta IV.

The Delta II 7920 Heavy configuration uses nine stretched graphite epoxy motors that provide 135,900 pounds of thrust at liftoff, increasing the vehicle's lift performance up to 4,723 pounds (2,142 kilograms) to geosynchronous transfer orbit. For the SIRTF mission, the Delta II Heavy provided 31 percent more performance than the current Delta II.

The next Boeing Delta launch is the Defense Satellite Communications System spacecraft, DSCS III B6 for the U.S. Air Force aboard a Delta IV Medium on Aug. 28 from Cape Canaveral.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses. Headquartered in St. Louis, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $25 billion business. It provides systems solutions to its global military, government, and commercial customers. It is a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; the world's largest military aircraft manufacturer; the world's largest satellite manufacturer and a leading provider of space-based communications; the primary systems integrator for U.S. missile defense; NASA's largest contractor; and a global leader in launch services.

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Boeing Delta website

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