Boeing Delta II Sends NASA Spacecraft on a Rendezvous with a Comet

A Boeing [NYSE: BA] Delta II rocket launched a NASA spacecraft today that will collide with a comet, causing a crater that will enable scientists to learn more about comets and their role in the formation of the Universe.

The "Deep Impact" spacecraft was launched by a Delta II 7925-9.5 launch vehicle. Lift-off occurred at 1:47:08 p.m. EST from Space Launch Complex (SLC) 17B, Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, Fla.

The flight lasted approximately 34-minutes, placing Deep Impact into a trajectory path with the comet "Tempel 1."

Deep Impact will release a projectile or "impactor" that will collide with Tempel 1 in July 2005. The impactor has an autonomous guidance system, propulsion system and onboard cameras to keep it on course after its release from the mother ship, that will fly by Tempel 1 to take images of the comet after impact.

"What a great way to start our year off with a bang," said Dan Collins, vice president, Boeing Expendable Launch Systems. "This exciting mission will reveal more information about how the Universe was formed."

Deep Impact's impactor measures one-meter in diameter, 0.8-meters tall and weighs approximately 370 kg. It will hit Tempel 1, leaving a crater somewhere between the size of a house and a football stadium, and approximately two-to 14-stories deep. Post-impact debris, such as dust and gases, and the interior of the crater will also be observed by the Hubble, Spitzer and Chandra telescopes as well as by telescopes on Earth. This is the first time that researchers will be able to study a comet's interior.

The Delta II vehicle that launched Deep Impact used a Rocketdyne RS-27A main engine, nine Alliant Techsystems solid rocket boosters, an Aerojet AJ10-118K second-stage engine, a Thiokol Star 48B third-stage motor, and a nine-and-a-half-foot diameter payload fairing.

The next Delta launch is the NOAA-N mission for NASA aboard a Delta II rocket planned for March from Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif.

A unit of The Boeing Company, Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is one of the world's largest space and defense businesses. Headquartered in St. Louis , Boeing Integrated Defense Systems is a $27 billion business. It provides network-centric system solutions to its global military, government, and commercial customers. It is a leading provider of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance systems; 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 and Department of Homeland Security; NASA's largest contractor; and a global leader in launch services.

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