Starliner Space Capsule Completes Parachute Testing

Fifth successful test validates system safety, robustness ahead of launches later this year

WHITE SANDS, N.M., June 25, 2019 — Boeing [NYSE: BA] cleared another milestone toward launching its Starliner space capsule with the fifth, and final, qualification test of the vehicle's parachute system.

The final test was the most difficult. Two parachutes were disabled on a Starliner test article that was dropped from a balloon at an altitude of 40,000 feet. During a four-minute descent, the other parachutes deployed and the capsule touched down as planned at the U.S. Army's White Sands Missile Range. That installation will be a primary landing site for missions, as Starliner will be the first orbital American capsule to land on land rather than water.

"Safety for our astronauts remains our singular focus and this successful landing in a difficult situation affirms the deep commitment of everyone on the team," said Boeing Starliner Vice President John Mulholland. "I want to thank our Starliner teammates, including NASA and the U.S. Army at White Sands, for their part in ensuring mission safety and success. With their contributions Starliner will venture to the International Space Station later this year and safely return home."

Each Starliner will carry more than half a dozen parachutes, which are manufactured by Airborne Systems of Santa Ana, Calif. Airbags made by Delaware's ILC Dover will cushion Starliner at landing. Those airbags and other landing systems have already been qualified for crews through rigorous test programs. During the latest test, one out of the two drogue parachutes and one out of the three main parachutes were intentionally disabled.

The first Starliner launch, from Florida's Kennedy Space Center, is expected this summer. A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket will send an uncrewed Starliner to the space station for a week-long stay. After that, Boeing astronaut Chris Ferguson, and NASA astronauts Mike Fincke and Nicole Mann, could make the first crewed Starliner flight by year's end.

Ferguson, Fincke, and Mann may be the first Americans launched from American soil since the space shuttle retired in 2011. Ferguson commanded that final shuttle mission. Also, Mann will be the first female astronaut on the first flight of a new space vehicle.

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Contact:

Rebecca Regan
Defense, Space and Security
Mobile: +1 321-607-2297
Office: +1 321-360-3663
Rebecca.a.regan@boeing.com

Josh Barrett
Defense, Space & Security
Mobile: +1 321-607-4118
Joshua.d.barrett2@boeing.com