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Branson spacecraft completes test flight

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Spacecraft's maiden flight

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

VSS Enterprise remained attached to carrier aircraft for duration of near 3-hour flight

Test-flight program is expected to continue through 2011 before commercial flights start

Virgin Galactic has envisioned one flight a week, with six tourists aboard

Each will pay \$200,000 for the ride and train for at least three days before going

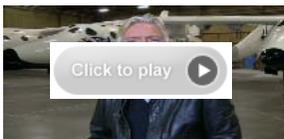
(CNN) -- British billionaire Richard Branson's dream of space travel that thousands of people can afford took a leap toward reality with the maiden flight of the world's first commercial spacecraft over California's Mojave Desert.

Branson's company Virgin Galactic announced Monday that the VSS Enterprise had successfully completed what it called a captive carry flight attached to a carrier plane.

The spacecraft's developer called it a "momentous day."

"The captive carry flight signifies the start of what we believe will be extremely exciting and successful spaceship flight test program," said Burt Rutan, founder of Scaled Composites, which built the spacecraft.

The VSS Enterprise remained attached to its carrier aircraft for the duration of the 2-hour, 54-minute flight, reaching an altitude of 45,000 feet, according to a statement from Virgin.



Video: Space tourism countdown

Eventually, the 60-foot long rocket plane will be taken 60,000 feet above the Earth by its carrier and fire rockets to propel itself into space.

The test-flight program is expected to continue through 2011, going first to a free glide and then to a powered flight before commercial flights begin.

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"Seeing the finished spaceship in December was a major day for us but watching VSS Enterprise fly for the first time really brings home what beautiful, ground-breaking vehicles Burt and his team have developed for us," Branson said.

"Today was another major step along that road and a testament to U.S. engineering and innovation," he said.

Virgin Galactic has envisioned one flight a week, with six tourists



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aboard. Each will pay \$200,000 for the ride and train for at least three days before going. About 80,000 people have placed their names on the waiting list for seats.

"What we want to be able to do is bring space travel down to a price range where hundreds of thousands of people would be able to experience space, and they never dreamed that [they] could," Branson said last year.

He has said he hopes the technology will lead to a new form of Earth travel, jetting people across oceans and continents faster through suborbital routes.

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kematian

kematian

One word...

WOOOOOOOOOO!

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OtieNos

OtieNos

keep up the good work sir Branson. the hater and idlers will always keep yapping. atleast for me i can go to space for a few dollars and not a few degrees in rocket/military science as NASA would require of me. we need more Bransons in the world. who denies that??

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stopthewaste

stopthewaste

I wonder if it will be used to hookup with the international space station.

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MammothJones

MammothJones

ANY reach into space is a good step for humanity. Imagine people thousands of years ago complaining that trying to create machines that could travel over water was such a waste of time and those people could be put to more immediate use elsewhere...We shouldn't let the short sighted knuckle draggers ...[more](#)

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GoodAtheist

GoodAtheist

I would love to believe, MammothJones, that, in a few hundred or thousand years, humans will be physically visiting other star systems. Sadly, given advances in and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, not to mention environmental deterioration, it is more likely humanity, in a few hundred ...[more](#)

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rtrauben

rtrauben

sales tax on your cosmetic look at me 200K\$ trip will be most appreciated by our nation.

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GoodAtheist

GoodAtheist

I once achieved weightlessness in my Dad's 1987 Oldsmobile, on a hilly country road. It was nighttime, so the sky was black. I guess that makes me two fifths of the way to being an astronaut! Awesome!

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kyle71

kyle71

A note to those who question whether the ship actually reaches "space".1. Do the passengers feel "weightless"? Yes (just like anyone in free fall)2. Is the sky black? Yes3. Can they see an impressive curvature of the Earth from that altitude? Yes4. Can a person survive at that altitude without equip ...[more](#)

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GoodAtheist

GoodAtheist

Private human space flight may seem fanciful, gimmicky or unrealistic now, but how do you think the concept of airplanes was viewed when the Wright Brothers were hard at work in their Dayton bicycle shop? The brothers (or at least one of them) lived to see their invention permanently and drastically ...[more](#)

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Cyborg80

Cyborg80

I am going to put away \$1,000 a month for 16 years and 8 months...eventually I will go on this ride...

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JJVachon

JJVachon

If humanity survives it won't be long before we are jetting out way to planets and beyond.

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**parrotsun**

parrotsun

Is that guy still scamming people around with his "fake" space flight?...300,000 ft is not even space yet, that is the troposphere...many meteorological balloons are flying in that altitude..oh well..!

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**jcreel00**

jcreel00

Actually parrotsun, 300,000ft is 91.44 km. The Troposphere is from 0-20 km. Weather Balloons travel in the Stratosphere which is 20-50 km. 91 km puts them in the Thermosphere which is the highest level the shuttles reach. Even the International Space Station doesn't go into the Exosphere. So yes, I ...more

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**moronpaul**

moronpaul

We haven't run out of history yet folks. Spaceship one is an example of America at it's best. Private investment, private innovation for the public!

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**1percenter**

1percenter

when they first started this nonsense, the vehicle was still in an aerodynamic environment and they proclaimed that they had "flown in outer space!!!" if you are still in an aerodynamic environment, you are NOT in outer space...what a load of "snake oil"...

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**TimothyLee**

TimothyLee

At \$200 grand a pop, this is just another toy for the uber rich to enjoy. I'm guessing that's probably a year in purgatory considering all of the good that could be done with that money ;)

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**katdog**

katdog

I think Timothy would be a fair God. One year in Purgatory isn't such a long time. I hear they have WiFi (albeit 56k). What about for people who buy Gucci/Louis Vuitton etc?

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**NoNameJim**

NoNameJim

wow, the guy points there are more charitable things that can be done with that money, and you all start screaming about socialism and gay whales?

gee, overreact much?

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**eyevibe**

eyevibe

Why it a sin all of a sudden to be rich? This nation was founded on capitalism and now everybody thinks the rich should be giving their money away. And then you wonder why people are screaming socialism?

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Mike500

Mike500

Yes, let's tax all their money to pay for the health care bill. After all, exploration serves no purpose. If we were meant to fly, we'd have wings. Free the illegals. Nuke the unborn gay whales. Any other whack job causes you want?

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LPPP

LPPP

Right! Because you alone should dictate how people spend their own money.

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MikeBCNU

MikeBCNU

CNN - every time i click on a news story video and see a commercial - i close my browser and go somewhere else

6 hours ago | [Like \(8\)](#) | [Report abuse](#)



CarlosCh

CarlosCh

If every one behaved like you, soon we would be paying thousands of dollars to be able to get the news, the shows, etc.

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TimothyLee

TimothyLee

I have to agree with cobaltblue. A few adds are a small price to pay for all of this otherwise free content.

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cobaltblue

cobaltblue

Do you think the money to maintain this site and all the content on it just falls out of a black hole somewhere? You better hope enough of these news organizations don't get the idea to start subscription based services because you'll really be crying then.

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