

BBC



APOLLO 17: THE FINAL LUNAR LANDING & ITS LEGACY

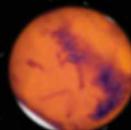


#211 DECEMBER 2022

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ILLUSTRATION

▲ The Boeing 747 will release a 21-metre satellite-bearing rocket (inset) into low-Earth orbit after takeoff from Spaceport Cornwall

First space launch from UK soil

Virgin Orbit will deploy seven satellites, many of which were built with UK involvement

Countdown to the first ever space launch from UK soil could finally reach zero, with the first launch from Spaceport Cornwall expected to take place in November this year (exact date yet to be confirmed at the time of writing).

The mission, called 'Start Me Up', is being carried out by private spaceflight company Virgin Orbit and will also be the first private launch from anywhere in Europe. The launch will be in two stages, the first of which uses a modified Boeing 747 aircraft, called Cosmic Girl, to reach an altitude of around 10,000km. The plane arrived at Cornwall's Newquay Airport on 11 October.

"Seeing Virgin Orbit's aircraft take off is an exciting reminder that we are close to the first launch from UK soil and the

first launch of a satellite from Europe," says Ian Annett, Deputy CEO of the UK Space Agency.

Once at altitude, the carrier plane will drop a 21-metre LauncherOne rocket attached beneath its wing. After four seconds of freefall, the rocket will fire its engines to travel towards low-Earth orbit at 12,875km/h.

Once in orbit it will deploy its payload of seven small satellites, many of which were built at least in part by the UK space industry. These span a wide range of purposes, from monitoring the environment to preventing illegal trafficking and terrorism, as well as several technology demonstrations. It will also feature the first orbital mission from the Sultanate of Oman.

The launch is hoped to be the first of many from UK soil, taking place not just from Cornwall but from another spaceport currently under construction in Sutherland in the Highlands of Scotland. Unlike Cornwall, which can only host 'horizontal launches' that take off like a plane, Sutherland will be able to host traditional vertical rocket launches, making the UK an even more attractive place to launch satellites from. Both sites are part of the UK Space Agency's long-term plan to make the UK a major player in the spaceflight industry.

"What an incredible honour it is for us to be part of something as monumental as bringing Britain into the business of launch," says Dan Hart, CEO of Virgin Orbit. www.virginorbit.com