

DRAGON ROARS INTO SPACE

1ST JUNE 2020

“One small step for man. One giant leap for mankind.” When those immortal words were spoken by Neil Armstrong 51 years ago, nobody could have predicted that space would remain one of the final frontiers for mankind for decades to come. The idea of sending civilians into space, or colonising Mars has remained in the realm of science fiction fantasy. But that might all be about to change.

On the 31st May 2020, the first-ever private spacecraft docked with the International Space Station. It completed its delivery of two astronauts, Doug Hurley and Robert Behnken. Until now, all space travel has been funded and carried out by governments around the world. SpaceX is owned by US billionaire Elon Musk. It was created in 2002 with the eventual aim of sending civilians into space.

The Dragon shuttle, SpaceX Demo-2, launched from Cape Canaveral in Florida on the 30th May. It became the first crewed ship to launch from American soil since 2011. Not only that, but it was also the first private shuttle to head to ISS. The Falcon 9 rocket that launched the shuttle is one of the world’s most reusable rockets. Reusable technology will make future space flight cheaper and more efficient. It is hoped that this might make space flight possible for civilians, one day soon.

It took the shuttle a little under 19 hours to reach

the ISS. On the way, it orbited the Earth twice to bring itself in line with the space station. It docked at just after 15:15 GMT, but it took a further few hours to make it safe for the astronauts to enter the ISS itself. These checks involved ensuring the pressure in the shuttle was equalised to the pressure of the ISS and to make sure the locking mechanisms were fully engaged.

This is far from being Doug Hurley’s first time to the ISS. In 2009 he was one of the pilots that delivered the Japanese research facility to the station in a 15-day mission. He returned again in 2011 on the final NASA shuttle, Atlantis. That mission lasted nearly 13 days. In total, Hurley has spent over 683 hours in space. The latest mission is due to last between 30 and 90 days.

As they left the Earth’s atmosphere, Behnken said that Earth was “a single planet with a shared atmosphere. It’s our shared place in this universe.”

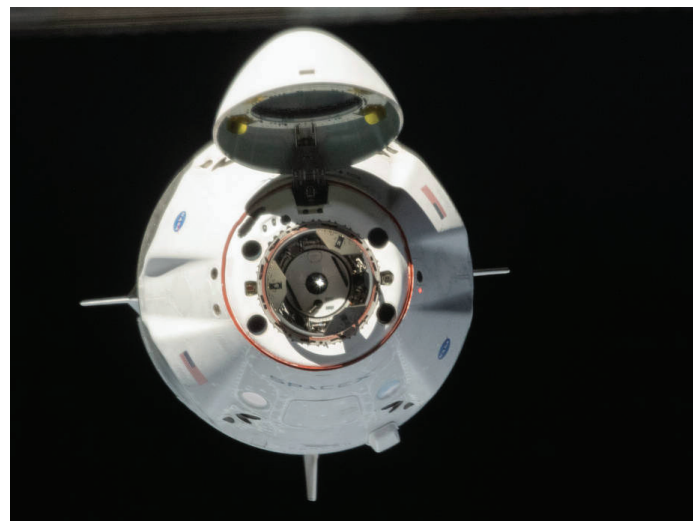


Image used under Public Domain copyright license from NASA

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. When did the Dragon shuttle launch?
2. How long did the journey to the ISS take?
3. When was the previous last launch of astronauts from American soil?
4. How many times has Doug Hurley visited the ISS?
5. Which company is hoping to send citizens into space?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S

What had to happen before the two astronauts could enter the ISS?

V

Which word means that the shuttle joined with the ISS?

I

What do you think the quote from Behnken tells you about how he feels about the Earth?

V

What does the phrase “final frontier” tell you about space?

I

Why is it important that future flights are cheaper and more efficient?

Answers:

1. 30th May 2020
2. Just under 19 hours
3. 2011
4. 3
5. SpaceX

S: The pressure had to be equalised and the locks checked

V: Docked

I: He thinks that it is a shared planet, and we should share it with each other. Accept similar answers.

V: It is the last place we have to conquer/visit

I: It will make them more affordable for other people and have less impact on the world.