Atlas V Team Begins Launch Preparations For AV-003

Meets Milestones for High-Performance Configuration

Lockheed Martin's Atlas team has begun preparing the next Atlas V rocket for its scheduled launch of the Rainbow satellite in July. AV-003 is distinguished visually by a 5-meter diameter payload fairing, which encloses the satellite, and two Aerojet strap-on solid rocket boosters (SRBs) to augment liftoff thrust and vehicle performance.

AV-003 completed the initial steps toward launch with booster-on-stand (BOS) activity May 21, during which the launch team erected the Atlas booster in the Vertical Integration Facility (VIF). Booster on stand was followed by attachment of the two SRBs May 23-24. The vehicle had already completed initial power-on testing in the Atlas Spaceflight Operations Center (ASOC) while launch operations were underway for AV-002, which successfully launched the Hellas-Sat satellite May 13.

"Days after launching AV-002 we were ready to put the next Atlas V on the pad, which shows the flexibility of our launch facilities as well as our ability to conduct simultaneous operations at the ASOC and the pad. With only two launches under our belts, we have achieved our advertised flow," said Adrian Laffitte, Lockheed Martin's director of Atlas programs at Cape Canaveral.

Another impressive milestone was achieved during the AV-002 mission. For the first time in the U.S. launch industry, a space launch vehicle was rolled out to the pad and launched within 12 hours. The launch team further demonstrated the ability to quickly troubleshoot an issue during the first day's countdown, which required the vehicle to be rolled back to the Vertical Integration Facility that afternoon. A monitoring unit on the vehicle was replaced, and AV-002 was rolled out to the pad the next morning and launched successfully within 12 hours.

"This is another remarkable demonstration of how talented and experienced this launch team is and how efficient the Atlas V system has proven to be," added Laffitte.

The Atlas V AV-003 vehicle scheduled for launch in July will use two solid rocket boosters built by Aerojet of Sacramento, Calif., each of which is 67 feet in length. As many as five solid rocket boosters can be used on the Atlas V to meet mission performance requirements, with each SRB providing up to approximately 400,000 pounds of thrust. Additionally, the 5-meter fairing, a flight-proven design built by Contraves Space of Zurich, Switzerland, will enclose the Centaur upper stage and the Rainbow satellite. Last December, a practice countdown for AV-002 used a 5-meter fairing to validate the interfaces with launch facilities at Complex 41. The payload fairing flight hardware arrived at Cape Canaveral May 15 and is being processed for encapsulation activities to support the scheduled launch in July.

The next processing milestone for AV-003 will be the launch countdown wet dress rehearsal scheduled for June 23, which will be the final major test prior to launch.

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