Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter Successfully Placed In Orbit Around Mars

The Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter spacecraft, designed and built by Lockheed Martinfor the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), was successfully placed in orbit around Mars this afternoon. The spacecraft's flight and operations in space are controlled by teams at JPL in Pasadena, Calif., and Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company operations near Denver, Colo. The Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter joins the 2001 Mars Odyssey and the Mars Global Surveyor -- both designed and built for NASA by Lockheed Martin -- in orbit around the red planet.

"This is a monumental achievement for NASA JPL and the space community," said Jim Crocker, vice president of Civil Space at Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company as he stood with the flight team at JPL in Pasadena. "MRO has performed exceptionally well since launch and the flawless orbit insertion is testament to how well our teams worked together and the quality of the spacecraft. Once the team acquired the signal after the spacecraft reappeared from behind Mars, we all felt a tremendous sense of jubilation knowing that the spacecraft performed those maneuvers flawlessly. NASA and JPL now have another healthy satellite in orbit around Mars."

On March 7, final commands were sent to the spacecraft to ready it for orbit insertion. Just before 1:25 p.m. PT today, those commands fired the six main engines for a 27-minute burn that slowed the spacecraft, allowed it to be captured by Mars' gravity, and placed it into an elliptical polar orbit around Mars that is initial 35.5 hours long.

During the next six months, the flight team will put MRO through a series of aerobraking maneuvers -- dipping the spacecraft into the upper Martian atmosphere -- to slow it even further and tighten its highly elliptical orbit to a final circular orbit. MRO is scheduled to begin its primary mission in November 2006. Using its suite of six instruments, it will perform scientific reconnaissance of the planet's surface, delivering data five times greater than all previous Mars missions, providing global maps of the planet and its climate, looking for future landing sites, and enabling communications support and data relay for missions planned for 2007 and beyond.

Lockheed Martin has been an industry partner with NASA and the JPL for more than three decades on many interplanetary missions that have ushered in a new and exciting era in the scientific study of our universe and more, specifically Mars. Beginning in 1971 with the Atlas/Centaur launch of Mariner 9 as well as the Viking missions in 1975, and continuing with the Phoenix lander mission in 2007, Lockheed Martin has been at the forefront in the development of spacecraft used to explore Mars.

Lockheed Martin Space Systems Company is one of the major operating units of Lockheed Martin Corporation. Space Systems designs, develops, tests, manufactures and operates a variety of advanced technology systems for military, civil and commercial customers. Chief products include a full range of space launch systems, including heavy-lift capability, ground systems, remote sensing and communications satellites for commercial and government customers, advanced space observatories and interplanetary spacecraft, fleet ballistic missiles and missile defense systems.

Headquartered in Bethesda, Md., Lockheed Martin employs about 135,000 people worldwide and is principally engaged in the research, design, development, manufacture, integration and sustainment of advanced technology systems, products and services. The corporation reported 2005 sales of $37.2 Billion.

Media Contact: Gary Napier, Lockheed Martin Space Systems
(303) 971-4012; gary.p.napier@lmco.com

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