Lockheed Martin-Built Orion Spacecraft Sends Astronauts Moonward For The First Time In 53 Years

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, Fla., April 1, 2026 /PRNewswire/ -- NASA's Orion spacecraft – built by Lockheed Martin (NYSE: LMT) – launched on the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket from Kennedy Space Center, Florida at 6:35 p.m. ET today, marking the start of NASA's historic Artemis II mission and a crewed return to the Moon.

For this first crewed test flight of the Artemis program, Orion is carrying four crew members – NASA astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch, and Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen. During the 10-day mission, the astronauts will complete two orbits around Earth before traveling nearly 5,000 miles beyond the far side of the Moon and almost 250,000 miles from Earth.

"Today's launch is just the beginning of this mission, where we look forward to testing the Orion systems and proving it will be capable of transporting crews to the lunar surface and return them home," said Robert Lightfoot, president, Lockheed Martin Space. "This historic moment marks a renewed journey to the Moon and a critical step toward future crewed landings."

What's New on Orion Artemis II
The Orion spacecraft for this mission – named *Integrity* by its astronaut crew – features several new systems to help keep humans safe in deep space. These include:

- Environmental control and life support systems, critical to keep the crew safe and comfortable
- Updated displays and controls for the crew to fly Orion
- Audio communications including an experimental laser communication system to communicate with NASA mission control in Houston
- Fully functional Launch Abort System to pull Orion and the crew to safety in the event of an emergency during launch
- Exercise machine, potable water and galley to maintain strength, hydration and nutrition
- Waste management system and hygiene bay, a first for a deep space mission

An Epic 10-Day Journey
Over the 10-day mission, the crew will perform a multitude of critical system checkouts, including a proximity maneuvering demo, to verify the vehicle's readiness for deep space operations. They will travel on a free-return trajectory around the Moon – conducting observations and imaging of the far side lunar surface – that will generate essential data on spacecraft performance and human health in deep space to enable future landing missions.

On April 10, after completing its 10-day mission around the Moon, Orion and its crew will re-enter the Earth's atmosphere at 30 times the speed of sound and then slow down to just under 20 mph, splashing down in the Pacific Ocean off the coast of San Diego, California.

"Our team has poured years of precision, problem solving and passion into building Orion and seeing it on its way to taking astronauts around the Moon in this test flight is incredible," said Kirk Shireman, VP and Orion program manager at Lockheed Martin Space. "We are excited for this mission to prepare for future crewed flights, seeing humans go farther than we've gone before and proving the Moon is once again within our reach."

The public can track Orion and its crew in real time during the mission, including distances from the Earth and Moon, mission duration, and more. NASA's Artemis Real-time Orbit Website (AROW) will create visuals from Orion data. Updates will also be sent out in real-time over Lockheed Martin Space's X channel.

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