

NEWS RELEASE



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TWO OF THREE SPACE SHUTTLE COMPONENTS STACKED AND READY TO GO

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, FL (March 1) -- United Space Alliance (USA) employees achieved a major milestone yesterday in the march toward returning the Space Shuttle to flight as they attached a large, orange external fuel tank to two solid rocket boosters (SRB) in the Vehicle Assembly Building at Kennedy Space Center.

“Two-thirds of the Shuttle components for STS-114 are now on the mobile launch platform. In a few weeks, we’ll roll Discovery over to the VAB and get stacked and ready to roll to the pad,” said Bill Pickavance, USA’s Vice President of Florida Operations. “This is an exciting day for USA employees, who have worked long and hard to get us here.”

“This was a great team effort involving NASA, Boeing, Lockheed, ATK-Thiokol, Hamilton Sundstrand, USA and many others. Only by working together were we able to overcome challenges and hit the milestones for return to flight.”

STS-114 is scheduled to fly to the International Space Station in mid-May.

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As the prime Shuttle contractor for NASA, USA is charged with processing and maintaining the Space Shuttle from the time it lands to the time it launches. In addition to taking care of the three orbiters in the Shuttle fleet, USA employees refurbish and prepare the non-motor segments of the SRBs, which help propel the Shuttle off the launch pad, and they process the External Tank (ET) once it arrives at KSC from Michoud, Louisiana, where the tanks are made. The ET provides fuel for the orbiter main engines.

Following the Columbia accident in 2003, the fuel tank was re-designed to prevent large pieces of foam from coming off and hitting the orbiter in critical areas. As a result of those design changes, USA workers at KSC had to learn new procedures for preparing the tank for flight. They were trained in new foam spraying techniques for closeout operations in critical areas and were charged with inspecting and performing check-outs on a variety of new features, such as the Bipod heater and the new ET camera, which will provide images of the tank and orbiter during ascent. The bipod heater replaces the foam ramp that was used to insulate the forward attach point where the orbiter connects to the external tank. The SRBs have also undergone changes during the last two years. One example is the bolt-catcher that was redesigned to improve its strength and safety. This device catches the bolt that attaches the SRBs to the tank after the bolt is blown off during separation of the SRBs from the tank during flight.

“Most people don’t realize the volume of work that we’ve handled during the past two years,” said Mark Nappi, USA Associate Program Manager for Ground Operations. “There have been many changes to our flight hardware and to our processes, and our people have put their heart and soul into getting it all done as safely and as efficiently as possible so that we can return to the International Space Station and complete the first step of the Nation’s Vision for Space Exploration.”

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Pickavance said today's mating of the External Tank to the Solid Rocket Boosters is a significant step toward the goal of returning to flight.

"We are all looking forward to flying shuttles again, and to launching the next vehicle in the evolution of the manned space flight program," he said.

United Space Alliance, established in 1995, is a space operations business offering products and services in space flight training, space hardware processing, launch and return operations and on-orbit operations. A limited liability company owned equally by Boeing and Lockheed Martin, USA serves as NASA's prime contractor for the Space Shuttle and provides operations services for the International Space Station. USA employs more than 10,000 people in Texas, Florida, Alabama, Washington, D.C., and Russia.

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