

NEWS RELEASE



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DISCOVERY ROLLS TO VEHICLE ASSEMBLY BUILDING FOR MATE TO STS-114 TANK AND BOOSTER ROCKETS

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER, FL (March 29) -- Orbiter Discovery, the Space Shuttle vehicle that will launch to the International Space Station on the Return To Flight mission this summer, today rolled out of Orbital Processing Facility 3 (OPF) – its home for the last three years – and into the Vehicle Assembly Building (VAB) where it will be mated to its waiting external tank and solid rocket boosters.

United Space Alliance employees, who have primary responsibility for processing the orbiter, expressed pride and excitement as the orbiter left the OPF.

“It was really exciting to see it move,” said Jay Hanks, a USA electrical technician who has been working in the forward section of Discovery. “Everyone has been working so hard, it just feels really great to deliver this vehicle to the VAB.”

“Most people don’t realize the volume of work that we’ve handled during the past two and a half 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 – as well as our NASA partners and our contractor partners -- 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.”

The oldest of the three orbiters in the Shuttle fleet, Discovery last flew in August 2001 on STS-105.

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From August 2002 to August 2003, the orbiter underwent its Orbiter Major Modification (OMM), the first orbiter to do so at KSC. The OMM was followed by almost a year of system testing and modifications that resulted from the Columbia Accident Investigation Board review. In July 2004, Discovery was powered up, signaling the beginning of a more normal processing flow.

Major changes to the orbiter include: the installation of debris sensors in the wing leading edges; the addition of the Orbiter Boom Sensor System, which will attach to the Shuttle arm to inspect the thermal protection system; an upgraded cockpit display; refurbishment of the rudder speed brake and its attaching hardware; refurbishment of the body flap and its attaching hardware; thicker windows to provide a higher safety margin; and a significantly higher-than-normal tile and thermal blanket replacement because of modifications.

“The KSC shuttle processing team – including NASA and all the contractors – has worked long and hard and gone above and beyond to achieve this milestone,” said Bill Pickavance, USA’s Vice President of Florida Operations. “They have worked their hearts out to make sure this is the safest flight ever, and we’re all looking forward to a successful mission.”

United Space Alliance, LLC, 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 and Alabama.

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