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A picture of White Knight Two, Virgin Galactic's mothership
Bill Deaver / Mojave Desert News

Virgin Galactic 'Mothership' Passes Test Flight

The twin-fuselage airplane performed well in tests

The Virgin Galactic company took a giant leap forward towards its objective - that of carrying tourists in suborbital flights - with the successful testing of the White Knight Two launch platform, an odd-shape airplane that will be the backbone of VG's future fleet. The platform has a double-fuselage construction, which makes it look weird, but those who assisted the 1 hour-long flight say that 99 percent of the test went beyond expectations.

"It's a big day. I think it's a real reflective time. When everybody's looking for a bailout, there are still people that are doing something for a much larger reason," the general manager of the Mojave Air and Space Port in California, Stuart Witt, said on Sunday.

"It all went well ... all the big things worked well. Overall, 99 percent on target and everybody is really happy. You get an airplane that's this weird and get it up and get it down ... and it's safe on deck," added Dick Rutan, the astronaut who piloted the Voyager aircraft around the world in 1986.

"And here we are on a Sunday morning ... in a place out here in the middle of nowhere and really neat stuff is happening. It just looked beautiful. What brings people to this desolate landscape on a Sunday morning in December is more about what forced them here. Innovation by the private sector is a void being filled because NASA deserted 90 percent of the sandbox and left it open for us to fill," shared Witt.

The company responsible for the construction of White Knight Two is Scaled Composites of Mojave, Calif., and VG announced that it had placed an additional order, for another mothership. In all, the company will have 2 launch platforms and 5 SpaceShipTwo rocket planes, which are the actual vehicles that will reach orbit.

The SpaceShipTwo will house 2 crew members and 6 passengers. Each of the space tourists will have to pay about \$200,000 for their seat, but they will be guaranteed the experience of a lifetime.

The take-off process is complicated, yet it all depends on White Knight Two's ability to lift off the ground carrying the SST on its back. The fact that the launch platform has two fuselages was also prompted by the technical requirements that come with launching a rocket plane from another plane, while at high altitudes.