

A WB-57 pilot just made a heroic landing in Houston after its landing gear failed

One of NASA's three large WB-57 aircraft made an emergency landing at Ellington Field on Tuesday morning in southeastern Houston.

Video captured by KHOU 11 television showed the aircraft touching down on the runway without its landing gear extended. The pilot then maintains control of the vehicle as it slides down the runway, slowing the aircraft through friction. The crew was not harmed, NASA spokesperson Bethany Stevens said.

[embedded content]

WB-57 landing.

"Today, a mechanical issue with one of NASA's WB-57s resulted in a gear-up landing at Ellington Field," she said. "Response to the incident is ongoing, and all crew are safe at this time. As with any incident, a thorough investigation will be conducted by NASA into the cause. NASA will transparently update the public as we gather more information."

The B-57 line of aircraft dates back to 1944, when the English Electric Company began developing the plane. After the Royal Air Force showcased the B-57 in 1951 by crossing the Atlantic in a record four hours and 40 minutes and becoming the first jet-powered aircraft to span the Atlantic without refueling, the United States Air Force began buying them to replace its aging Douglas B-26 Invader.

Now used for science

The aircraft performed bombing missions in Vietnam and other military campaigns, and a variant that later became the WB-57 was designed with longer wings that could fly even higher, up to 62,000 feet. This proved useful for weather reconnaissance and, around the world, to sample the upper atmosphere for evidence of nuclear debris where US officials suspected the atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons.

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