Rocket Report: Indian startup nears first launch; SpaceX's millenary milestone

Refurbishment over production… The production of 1,000 Merlin 1D engines is a remarkable milestone for any rocket engine, but it's important to note that the Merlin 1D is reusable. The Merlin 1D has logged more than 6,000 engine flights with 1,000 units. "With Falcon's reusability, recovering these engines has enabled continued reliability enhancements, making Merlin one of the most reliable rocket engines ever manufactured," SpaceX wrote on X. Another highly reliable, but single-use, rocket engine with similar thrust is Russia's RD-107/108. Five of those have powered each variant of Russia's R-7 rocket family since the 1950s, a legacy now carried on by the Soyuz launch vehicle. With more than 2,000 flights by Soyuz and its kin, that amounts to more than 10,000 RD-107 and 108 engines produced at a plant in Samara, Russia.

SpaceX launches rare GEO mission. A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket launched Sunday carrying a multi-ton radio broadcasting satellite for SiriusXM to replace two aging satellites in geostationary Earth orbit, Spaceflight Now reports. The SXM-11 satellite is a behemoth as far as spacecraft go, with a launch mass of about roughly 7 metric tons (15,000 pounds). The satellite is destined for a position over the equator at an altitude of more than 22,000 miles (nearly 36,000 kilometers), where its velocity will match the Earth's rotation to provide continuous radio broadcast coverage over the United States.

Still in business… Of SpaceX's 78 launches of the Falcon 9 and Falcon Heavy this year, this was just the third carrying a

payload heading for geostationary orbit, once the preferred destination for nearly all commercial communications satellites. Today, the trend is decidedly bending toward low-Earth orbit with megaconstellations like Starlink. But SiriusXM remains in business, as does the manufacturer of the SXM-11 satellite: Lanteris Space Systems, a subsidiary of Texas-based Intuitive Machines. The company, formerly branded as Maxar, was acquired by Intuitive Machines in January 2026 for about $800 million.

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