# SpaceX’s Crew Dragon gets a launch date—May 27

Enlarge / Doug Hurley, right, will command the Crew Dragon spacecraft.

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On Friday, NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine announced that the space agency has set a launch date for the first human launch to orbit from the United States in nearly a decade.

SpaceX’s Crew Dragon will launch on May 27 aboard a Falcon 9 rocket from Kennedy Space Center, at 4:32pm ET (20:32 UTC). This test flight will carry NASA astronauts Doug Hurley and Bob Behnken to the International Space Station for a multi-month mission—as long as 110 days but probably less.

The flight will have a nice symmetry with the last human orbital launch from US soil, which occurred on July 8, 2011 with the final flight of the space shuttle. Hurley served as pilot on that spaceflight, which lasted nearly 13 days and delivered supplies to the station. For the Dragon test flight, Hurley will be “spacecraft commander,” whereas Behnken will be “joint operations commander.” Effectively this means that Hurley commands the vehicle when in flight.

NASA and SpaceX must still clear some hurdles before the mission takes place, so this launch date may well slip to the right. But the fact that the space agency has published a date lends confidence to a crew launch from the United States

within two to three months.

Among the outstanding work are final parachute tests to certify the Dragon landing system as well as completion of an investigation into a Merlin engine failure during a Falcon 9 launch in March.

There are also complications due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has put several NASA centers on mandatory telework and prevented all but essential travel. This situation will likely complicate the process of holding “Flight Readiness Review” meetings, which normally entail dozens of senior officials gathering in a large room to discuss the safety of the vehicle.

But with Friday’s announcement, NASA would seem to have a plan to work through these issues. This coming May, or early June, has the potential to be an amazing time for the space agency and the rocket company—SpaceX—that will break the nation’s dependence upon Russia for access to space.

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