Sunday’s launch of a secret space plane produced some eye-catching images



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- An Atlas V rocket blasted off from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station on Saturday morning.
- Skies were partly sunny for the launch and the photos benefited greatly from the extra light.
- Well, not all the photos. This remote camera encountered a bit of material thrown up by liftoff.
- And it was downright dark in the maw of the rocket.
- But the broader context shows brilliant blue skies.
- This was the sixth launch of the Space Force’s X-37B spacecraft.
- It has flown five times on the Atlas V, and once on

SpaceX’s Falcon 9 rocket.

- The space plane will return on a runway at Kennedy Space Center when its mission of unspecified duration ends.
- The X-37B is shown inside the rocket’s payload fairing prior to launch.
- Hey, nice LOX ball!
- The Atlas V rocket carried this nice message into space.

On Sunday morning, an Atlas V rocket built by United Launch Alliance took off from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida. The rocket hauled the secretive X-37B space plane into orbit for the US Space Force.

The launch webcast ended just five minutes after the launch due to the classified nature of the mission, but the rocket company said it inserted the spacecraft into its target orbit. As a result, this X-37B (there are two different vehicles that rotate flights) successfully began what is likely to be an approximately two-year mission to conduct scientific research (and who knows what other kinds of activities for the military).

This launch was delayed from Saturday morning due to poor weather over the Florida-based spaceport, and selfishly we’re glad for the one-day scrub. Clearer skies on Sunday meant that images captured by remote cameras set up by Ben Cooper, who shoots photos for United Launch Alliance, benefited from clear skies and brilliant sunlight.

The end result, in the gallery above, is quite spectacular.

Listing image by ULA

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