

NASA tests Orion capsule for human space travel

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On December 5, NASA successfully tested its new Orion capsule, designed to carry humans to deep space destinations like Mars or an asteroid. The capsule launched from Kennedy Space Center, underwent a series of rigorous systems tests, and splashed down in the Pacific Ocean 4.5 hours later. Orion orbited the Earth twice at a distance of about 3,600 miles from the surface—fourteen times farther than the International Space Station (ISS).

The historic flight marks the first time that a spacecraft built for humans has traveled out of low-Earth orbit in over 40 years. The Orion capsule will undergo further unmanned testing in 2017 coupled with NASA's new rocket, the Space Launch System (SLS). NASA currently plans for the first crewed flight of the capsule and SLS to take place in 2021.

Sources: NASA, Space.com
