

Spaceport Cornwall: launch moves closer for the UK

- Spaceport Cornwall partner, Virgin Orbit, successfully completes first full orbital launch of satellite technology; bringing Cornwall one step closer to launch from UK soil
- Over 350 job roles to be created in space and associated industries through Spaceport Cornwall

As vital space programmes continue during the pandemic, Virgin Orbit has successfully completed the first full orbital launch of its LauncherOne system in the USA. Excitement has been building for many weeks in anticipation of this launch, which brings the UK's first ever launch from sovereign soil at Spaceport Cornwall a step closer.

On Sunday 17th of January, Virgin Orbit successfully accomplished their first commercial launch, with the company's carrier aircraft Cosmic Girl taking off from Mojave Air and Space Port in California.

Following the partial success of their first launch demo last May, the Virgin Orbit team have been focused on getting to this second launch. The rocket used for Launch Demo 2 shipped out of the factory for pre-launch activities in early November. At Mojave Air and Space Port, the system underwent extensive checkouts and tests, including fully loading the rocket with propellants like cryogenic liquid oxygen to verify the health of all rocket systems. The work leading up to the launch benefited hugely from operational refinements, as the Virgin Orbit team completed technical milestones at a much faster and more efficient pace compared to the initial demo.

During this launch, LauncherOne was carried to an altitude of more than 30,000 feet before it was dropped from the carrier aircraft and ignited its engines, launching into orbit. LauncherOne then deployed its payload into Low Earth Orbit.

The payload consisted of 10 CubeSats selected by NASA and primarily designed and built by U.S. universities. In the weeks prior to this second launch demo, Payload teams from universities across the country made the trip out to Long Beach to get their spacecraft prepared for flight. Virgin Orbit was awarded this contract via NASA's Venture Class Launch Services Program (VCLS), an initiative created to foster and enable the development of cutting-edge small launch capabilities.

As Virgin Orbit's key delivery partner in the UK, the flight's success accelerates Spaceport Cornwall's campaign to become the UK's first horizontal launch spaceport — as well as the first of its kind in Europe — by proving Virgin Orbit's mobile launch system is capable of providing a responsive, affordable and efficient way to launch small satellites.

Space and satellite technology is an invaluable resource to the global community. Virgin Orbit's Chief Executive Officer Dan Hart has commented that the strength of the British Space industry is one of the reasons he is so confident in the success of Spaceport Cornwall, stating:

“It is enormously exciting - there are small satellite companies in the UK that are very innovative. As a matter of fact small satellites have really been brought forth to a large degree by UK companies so I think there's a great possibility there. There's an enormous number of segments and there are opportunities for companies in the UK to play in every single one of them.”

In a much needed boost to the local and nationwide economy post-Coronavirus, Spaceport Cornwall is set to further strengthen the UK and Cornish industry by bringing 150 direct jobs by 2025.

This will add £200m Gross Value Added (GVA) to the economy, and will act as a catalyst for wider growth in associated sectors which use space derived data and applications.

Through this ground-breaking initiative an additional 240 jobs will be created in the supply chain and ancillary activities; positioning Spaceport Cornwall at the heart of the UK space industry by raising Cornwall's profile on the global stage.

Dan Hart, CEO, Virgin Orbit: "That LauncherOne was able to successfully reach orbit today is a testament to this team's talent, precision, drive, and ingenuity. Even in the face of a global pandemic, we've maintained a laser focus on fully demonstrating every element of this revolutionary launch system. That effort paid off today with a beautifully executed mission, and we couldn't be happier."

Ian Annett, Deputy CEO, UK Space Agency said: "Virgin Orbit's plans to operate from Spaceport Cornwall are a key part of the UK's ambition to be the first place in Europe to offer satellite launch services. The incredible demonstration of the LauncherOne system in the US brings this one step closer to reality.

"It is more important than ever to invest in innovation, support our home-grown firms and attract international space companies to the UK, creating jobs in a growing industry that can benefit communities across the country."

Geoff Brown, Cornwall Council Portfolio Holder for Transport, commented: "This is a bold step forward for Spaceport Cornwall as the now proven technology shows to the world that Virgin Orbit, and Cornwall, are capable of competing for a share of the global market for launching small satellites. A market which is worth a potential £3.9 billion.

"We are completely elated for the incredible team at Virgin Orbit after the years of hard work and dedication to reach this milestone and the team in Cornwall is looking forward to our partnership strengthening as we move towards our own launch in 2022."

Copy ends:

For more information and requests, please contact Jess Ratty on jess@ha-lo.co or call 07789102402

Editors notes:

ABOUT VIRGIN ORBIT

Virgin Orbit builds and operates the most flexible and responsive satellite launcher ever invented: LauncherOne, a dedicated launch service for commercial and government-built small satellites. LauncherOne rockets are designed and manufactured in Long Beach, California, and will be air-launched from our modified 747-400 carrier aircraft – allowing us to operate from locations all over the world in order to best serve each customer's needs. Virgin Orbit's systems are currently in an advanced stage of testing, with initial orbital launches expected soon. To learn more or to apply to join Virgin Orbit's talented and growing team, visit virginorbit.com.

ABOUT SPACEPORT CORNWALL

For video and other media content: www.spaceportcornwall.com/media

Spaceport Cornwall is the horizontal space launch site at Cornwall Airport Newquay, in South West England. Spaceport Cornwall is a partnership between Cornwall Council, commercial launch operator Virgin Orbit and Goonhilly Earth Station. The consortium will deliver small satellite launch into lower Earth Orbit, for the first time ever from the UK by 2022. The project is funded by the UK Space Agency, Cornwall Council, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership and Virgin Orbit.

SOCIAL HANDLES

Web: <https://spaceportcornwall.com/>

Twitter: @SpaceCornwall

Instagram: @spacecornwall

Linkedin: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/spaceport-cornwall/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/Spacecornwall/>