



VIRGIN GALACTIC IS ONE STEP CLOSER TO CARRYING TOURISTS TO SPACE

News / Manufacturer



On Friday, Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo successfully completed its third glide flight test over California's Mojave Desert. The company's SpaceShipTwo craft, called VSS Unity, was carried up to about 50,000 feet by VMS Eve, a WhiteKnightTwo craft, for a mid-air launch. The WhiteKnightTwo, a dual-fuselage, four-engine aircraft, was built specifically to launch Virgin's smaller crafts. After decoupling from Eve, VSS Unity glided down to a safe landing, according to Virgin Galactic. VSS Unity is the first SpaceShipTwo craft built by The Spaceship Company, Virgin Galactic's manufacturing arm.

This flight was VMS Eve's 226th flight, so it seems safe to say that the craft has proven itself. The other half of Virgin Galactic's human spaceflight system, SpaceShipTwo, still has some way to go in this respect, though.

But after the fatal crash of Virgin's first SpaceShipTwo in 2014, this successful test suggests that things may be back on track for Virgin Galactic.

Achieving reliable space flight is a significant scientific achievement for the private company. Virgin Galactic doesn't just want to design a reusable spacecraft for the sake of scientific curiosity, though. Friday's test represents another step toward Virgin founder Richard Branson's ultimate

goal of making space tourism a reality.

Fittingly, *VSS Unity* is designed with precisely that goal in mind. The craft has space for eight people, including two pilots and six passengers. It has windows along the sides and top of the fuselage so passengers can look out in multiple directions during their suborbital flight. It's as similar to a glass-bottom boat as a spaceship can be.

Even if the company makes this dream come true, though, space won't exactly be the next spring break destination, as a single flight will carry the price tag of a quarter million dollars. After all, rocket fuel is expensive, and there's no getting around physics. Even if Virgin Galactic can create an economy of scale that brings the price down, breaking free of Earth's gravitational pull requires a whole lot of juice.

We can still dream of taking one of these flights, though, and after this successful test, it's looking a little bit more possible.



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