VIRGIN GALACTIC WILL UNVEIL ITS NEW SPACEPLANE

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Tomorrow, private spaceflight company Virgin Galactic will unveil the newest version of SpaceShipTwo — the reusable spaceplane that will become the company's primary vehicle. The company has been without a main vehicle since October 2014, when a crash killed one test pilot and seriously injured another. After the accident, many journalists and industry experts expressed skepticism about Virgin Galactic's reliability. This new vehicle could help the company stage their comeback.

Of course, that all depends on how well SpaceShipTwo performs. The new vehicle will be structurally identical to the one that was lost, but there will be more automation, Virgin Galactic has said. The design change is in response to the 2014 cash, which was partly due to pilot error. New failsafes have been added to prevent such mistakes from happening in the future, the company has said, without explaining any specific details.

The first test flights of SpaceShipTwo will begin sometime this year, and that's when the changes will be truly evaluated. Virgin Galactic has had trouble in testing before. Besides the 2014 crash, a rocket engine exploded in 2007 during testing, killing three people.

Safety is crucial for Virgin Galactic, since its focus is launching paying customers to the edge of space. It's a unique goal for the private spaceflight industry right now; companies like Orbital ATK and the United Launch Alliance are mostly focused on launching satellites and cargo into orbit.

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Virgin Galactic eventually wants to launch satellites too — but the company already has hundreds of passengers who have signed up to fly on the first SpaceShipTwo flights, including numerous celebrities. Virgin Galactic is going to have to prove to its customers that it can take them to space and return them back to Earth as safely as possible.

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