
News Archive 2007

Successful launch for Space Shuttle Discovery - Thomas Reiter enroute to ISS

4 July 2006



With today's successful launch of the Space Shuttle Discovery, NASA has recommenced regular shuttle flights to the International Space Station (ISS). Onboard the Discovery today is ESA astronaut Thomas Reiter, from Germany, who will work alongside the ISS crew for six or seven months as part of Europe's 'Astrolab' mission, conducting research and other crew activities.

Professor Sigmar Wittig, Chairman of the Executive Board of the German Aerospace Center (DLR), congratulated NASA Administrator Michael Griffin on the successful launch of the Discovery, stating: "Today's shuttle launch marks an important step in the scientific use of the ISS and in further developing the station's future. As Thomas Reiter undertakes Europe's first long-duration mission on the ISS, the station's regular crew returns to three and the focus of activity re-centres on scientific research. Furthermore, deployment of Europe's Columbus lab module, scheduled for 2007, comes closer to realisation."

Discovery's mission, STS-121, is set to last 11 days. During this time, new technologies for the shuttle will be tested and the flight programme includes two spacewalks and the delivery of supplies and equipment to the ISS.

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