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Webcast: Astronaut Ernst Messerschmid returns to Spacelab - 25 years after the D1 mission

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Drops of orange juice that transform into cubes, astronauts sliding back and forth on a sled in zero gravity, repeated glimpses of the blue globe below. The images that reached Earth from the D1 Spacelab mission are spectacular even today. The first German mission, it was launched on 30 October 25 years ago from Cape Canaveral. Space Shuttle Challenger carried the European research laboratory, Spacelab, which looked like a gigantic metal can from the outside, packed full of technology on the inside. It was crewed by the astronauts Ernst Messerschmid, Reinhard Furrer and Wubbo Ockels, sent into orbit to perform almost 80 experiments in a state of weightlessness.



This was the first time a non-US control centre had taken control of a Space Shuttle. At the German Space Operations Center, on the premises of what was then the German Institute of Aviation and Spaceflight Research and Development (Deutsche Forschungs- und Versuchsanstalt für Luft- und Raumfahrt; DFVLR) in Oberpfaffenhofen, 80 scientists and engineers held the reins.

Former astronaut Ernst Messerschmid returns to the Spacelab module he floated around in 25 years ago for this DLR webcast. With a firm grip, the 65-year old opens the shutter behind which the experiments were stored back then, explains why DLR and the European Space Agency could only conduct some experiments in a glovebox, and tells us how he communicated with the ground team. Fellow astronaut Ulf Merbold remained on the ground to keep in contact with his colleagues in space from within the German control centre. The mission lasted 7 days, 44 minutes and 51 seconds, with astronauts and scientists working in shifts around the clock. Messerschmid believes that this Spacelab mission continues to provide benefits even now. The experience gained has contributed significantly to the work on the International Space Station, he says.

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