

Students launch experiments into space

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UPHAM, N.M. (KRQE) - The flight was delayed 21 minutes, but the launch of a rocket into sub-orbital space from Spaceport America near Truth or Consequences was successful.

According to the Spaceport America website, a live webcast and chat said that the delay was caused by a concern regarding one of the payloads on board the rocket.

The primary payloads were 27 science experiments from high school and college students across the southwest, mostly in New Mexico. Also along for the ride were some experiments from the Air Force and the ashes of about 30 people.

This was the ninth launch at Spaceport America and the fifth student rocket flight. A similar education launch at the Spaceport last year ended with a crash due to a computer error, but scientists say the problem was fixed.

Funding for the student experiments was acquired by the New Mexico Space Grant Consortium in Las Cruces, primarily through a grant from NASA.

After the brief technical delay the flight itself was perfect in every way, according to **UP Aerospace**, the company providing launch services.

The rocket roared 73 and 1/2 miles above the earth and spent about four minutes in space before re-entering the atmosphere.

"It's good to have a good successful flight," Jerry Larson of UP Aerospace said. "We had a lot of people working on this. We had Lockheed Martin and the Air Force and Schafer Corporation, all working to make sure this was successful."

The payload landed under its red parachute tested here earlier on a simulated payload.

Recovery was at the Army's White Sands Missile Range, which was also paid to provide radar tracking and a helicopter for payload pickup.

The payload, charred from its hypervelocity dash through the atmosphere, was quickly disassembled.

The human ashes flown were from people whose loved ones wanted them to go to space, at least for a little while...

"It's a very compelling mission for someone that's always been interested in space," said Charles Chafer, chief executive of **Celestis Inc.**, the company offering the flights.

UP Aerospace is already making plans to launch bigger rockets here. Those would lift even more weight and possibly future vehicles that could carry small payloads on into orbit.

Nearby the giant spaceport terminal complex is rising out of the desert. That's where space tourists are supposed to lift off from here in a couple of years.

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