

SpaceX plans private flight to the moon; 2 passengers to be launched in late 2018

USA TODAY

February 28, 2017 Tuesday

FIRST EDITION

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Section: NEWS; Pg. 1A

Length: 353 words

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Body

SpaceX founder Elon Musk said he plans to do a private space mission, using a SpaceX rocket to transport two passengers around the moon.

"I think this will be a very exciting mission," Musk said during a news conference this afternoon.

Musk said SpaceX was approached by "two private individuals" who know one another, but whom he did not identify.

They would be launched late next year on SpaceX's Dragon 2 vehicle on a Falcon Heavy rocket.

Musk said the flight would be on an autonomous spacecraft that needs no specially trained astronauts onboard.

"Dragon is designed to be an autonomous vehicle," Musk said, noting that it does cargo missions to the International Space Station with no one aboard.

He would not discuss what the passengers would be paying for the flight, only saying that this mission would cost more than a SpaceX resupply mission to the space station.

Musk said the weeklong mission would involve a trip of 300,000 to 400,000 miles.

He described the flight path as taking "a long loop around the moon," and getting close to the lunar surface, but not landing, before returning to Earth.

"It would skim the surface of the moon," is how he described it.

SpaceX provided additional details on its website.

"We are excited to announce that SpaceX has been approached to fly two private citizens on a trip around the moon late next year," the announcement said. "They have already paid a significant deposit to do a moon mission.

"Like the Apollo astronauts before them, these individuals will travel into space carrying the hopes and dreams of all humankind, driven by the universal human spirit of exploration."

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SpaceX said it plans "to conduct health and fitness tests, as well as begin initial training later this year. Other flight teams have also expressed strong interest, and we expect more to follow. Additional information will be released about the flight teams, contingent upon their approval and confirmation of the health and fitness test results."

Musk would not release more information on the prospective space travelers, including their genders. All he would say is that "it's nobody from Hollywood."

Load-Date: February 28, 2017

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