

powered by:

**boodle** get their savings kicks.  **START NOW**  
grocery coupons

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS CUSTOMER SERVICE: [Click here to contact us](#)  
[LCsun-news.com](#) · [Weather](#) · [Jobs](#) · [Cars](#) · [Real Estate](#) · [Apartments](#) · [Shopping](#) · [Classifieds](#)

**SUBSCRIBE NOW.**  
  
**MISS A DAY. MISS A LOT.**

# LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

## NEWS SECTIONS

- > Frontpage
- > News Archive
- > Around the Comm.
- > Business
  - + Financials
- > Celebrations
- > Elections 2006
- > Food
- > Healthy Living
- > Mi Casa
- > News
- > Obituaries
- > Opinion
- > Photo galleries
- > Pulse (Entertainment weekly)
  - + Online Arcadia
- > Seniors
- > Sports
- > Sunlife

## MEDIA PARTNERS

Alamogordo Daily News  
 Carlsbad Current-Argus  
 Deming Headlight  
 El Paso Times  
 Farmington Daily Times  
 Ruidoso News  
 Silver City Sun-News  
 Missile Ranger

## SEARCH

Enter search term(s)

 [Print Article](#)  [Email Article](#)

## First launch safe, but falls short

By Jose L. Medina Sun-News reporter

UPHAM — The first ever launch from New Mexico's Spaceport America landed in the desert Monday, failing to reach sub-orbital space.

With launch crew and onlookers cheering, Connecticut-based UP Aerospace launched its SpaceLoft XL rocket at 2:14 p.m., after a nearly seven-hour delay, from a temporary launch pad at the desolate site 45 miles north of Las Cruces.

But seconds into the launch, the rocket corkscrewed and disappeared from view, leaving a trail of smoke behind.

As those in the viewing area waited for two sonic booms that never came, Lonnie Sumpter, launch director and executive director of the New Mexico Spaceport Authority, announced that the rocket had experienced "an anomaly."

"It seemed to be going perfectly," said Rick Homans, state economic development cabinet secretary. "But about 10 seconds into its flight, it was clear there was a problem."

Launch officials said the rocket experienced an unexpected aerodynamic problem and reached an altitude of only 40,000 feet — roughly 7.5 miles — before falling back to earth miles away from the expected landing zone.



The SpaceLoft XL rocket launches Monday as the first rocket to lift off from Spaceport America. (Sun-News photo by Norm Dettlaff)



Astronomer Ron Dantowitz, of Dexter and Southfield schools in Brookline, Mass., lines up the high-speed tracking camera Monday before the launch of the SpaceLoft XL rocket from Spaceport America near Upham. (Sun-News photo by Norm Dettlaff)

UP Aerospace planned to send the rocket and its payload of more than 50 scientific experiments to an altitude of about 70 miles.

But company officials did not call the launch a disappointment.

"UP Aerospace proved its business model," said Bill Heiden, the company's chief financial officer. "We proved our relationships with our partners, we inaugurated the spaceport today (Monday).

"We gave young people a real look at what's involved in hands-on operations of space flight. We're thrilled with what we accomplished."

Tracey Larson, UP Aerospace spokeswoman, said the rocket motors worked perfectly, and getting the rocket airborne was a victory itself.

"Yeah, we'd like to see it hit space, but it's still such a huge accomplishment and it's the first one," Larson said.

Before Monday's delay, the launch had already been postponed three times this year. Monday's launch was originally scheduled for 7:30 a.m., but was pushed back because of a faulty transponder.

Crews worked to disassemble the rocket and test the systems with parts

from a second rocket. It wasn't until shortly after noon that the launch crew was able to start the two-hour countdown.

The rocket fired from its launch rail with a tail of fire behind it for what was expected to be a 20-minute flight. But only seconds into the flight, at an estimated speed of 625 mph, the 20-foot rocket wobbled and spun before expending its fuel and disappearing into the cloudless sky.

Heiden said Monday night the rocket landed west of White Sands Missile Range. Attempts to recover it will begin today.

"We have the coordinates of where it's at, we have visual of it from the air," Heiden said. "I don't know how long recovery will take, but we intend to return the payloads to our launch partners and retrieve the flight data recorders."

With the recorders, company engineers should be able to determine what caused the rocket to malfunction during its mission.

#### Advertisement



The rocket's failure to reach the target altitude was a disappointment to those who had scientific experiments on board.

University of Colorado students Kenny Harcsztark and Aaron Biel said the altitude reached by the rocket meets the needs of their experiment, but they were sorry they were unable to test radiation levels in space.

"Obviously we're somewhat disappointed," Biel said. "We wanted to take measurements of the space environment above 62 miles and

100 kilometers, and this is the way we could've done it.

"Obviously we'll get better, UP Aerospace will get better, and this is their first launch," Biel said.

Harcsztark believes some data will be available from the experiment.

"We actually flew (our experiment) on a weather balloon that went around 100,000 feet, so the rocket launch actually made it less than half the weather balloon, so we're pretty confident that our results will come out," Biel said.

The first ever launch from the spaceport site was called historic by company and state officials. UP Aerospace plans to attempt another launch during the X Prize in late October.

"While the particular mission didn't meet its objectives, we were able to perform the first launch from Spaceport America, and we did it safely and by the book," Homans said. "This was a major milestone for the spaceport and a big step toward our larger vision of a fully operational spaceport serving many customers."

Sumpter added, "Spaceport America, in a little more than one year, developed a professional team, communications systems, infrastructure, and procedures to safely complete today's launch and pave the way for many more in the near future."

Sun-News reporter Steve Ramirez contributed to this story.

Jose Medina can be reached at [jmedina@lcsun-news.com](mailto:jmedina@lcsun-news.com)

Monday's launch by the numbers

1: The number of launches conducted from Spaceport America, near Upham

3: The number of weeks until the next launch

7: The number of hours the launch was delayed Monday

10: The number of seconds into Monday's flight when the rocket began experiencing problems

20: The number of feet that equals length of the SpaceLoft XL rocket

50: The number of combined payloads and experiments carried by the rocket Monday


40,000: The number of feet the rocket reached before falling

369,600: The number of feet above earth SpaceLoft XL was supposed to have traveled Monday

225,000,000: The dollar amount to build Spaceport America

On the Net

UP Aerospace:  
www.upaerospace.com

 [RETURN TO TOP](#)

[Comments](#) |  
[Trackback](#)

« CLASSIFIED PARTNERS »

Jobs: [CareerBuilder.com](#) Cars: [Cars.com](#) Homes: [HomeFinder.com](#) Apartments: [Apartments.com](#) Shopping: [ShopLocal.com](#)

Copyright © 2006 Las Cruces Sun-News, a MediaNews Group Newspaper.

**[Local Homes For Sale](#)**

View Current & Local Home Listings. Find Real Estate In NM. Free!  
[www.HomeGain.com](#)

**[Las Cruces Experts](#)**

View all real estate in Las Cruces! Luxury homes from \$250,000  
[favoriteagent.com](#)

**[Real Estate in Las Cruces](#)**

Homes for Sale in Las Cruces Land or Homes in New Mexico  
[www.lascrucesdreamhomes.com](#)

**[Placitas NM Real Estate](#)**

View new featured real estate, condos, land and homes for sale.  
[alicesmithrealtor.com](#)

[Privacy Policy](#) | [MNG Corporate Site Map](#)