

SOARING SUCCESS

The first private space rocket blasts off!

Have you ever dreamed of traveling into outer space? Thanks to a team of inventors who have set their sights high, that reality may be closer than you think.

A rocket plane called *SpaceShipOne* launched into the record books in October. It became the first private spacecraft to carry humans into space and back twice within one week.

The *SpaceShipOne* team won a \$10 million prize for its record-breaking feat. Called the Ansari X Prize, it was designed to encourage people to build spacecraft to take paying tourists into space.

Bound for Space

SpaceShipOne is not the first spacecraft to travel into space. However, it is the first one that was built and launched without help

from the government. The U.S. space agency, NASA, sends people into space.

About the size of a minivan, *SpaceShipOne* took off from a runway in California's Mojave Desert. It was attached beneath a carrier plane called *White Knight*.

At 9 miles up, *SpaceShipOne* blasted free of the carrier plane. Then *SpaceShipOne* fired its rocket engine and streaked skyward to an

altitude, or height, of nearly 70 miles. It broke through Earth's atmosphere at 62 miles high. This height is considered the point where space begins.

SpaceShipOne blasted into the edge of space at three times the speed of sound. Sound travels about 700 miles per hour.

Prize Patrol

About an hour and a half after takeoff, pilot Brian Binnie glided the rocket plane to a smooth



READY FOR TAKEOFF: *SpaceShipOne*, attached underneath the carrier plane *White Knight*, prepares to make the first of its two flights into space.

69.6 miles

3 *SpaceShipOne* reaches the edge of space. It cruises to a maximum height of about 70 miles.

2 At 9 miles up, *SpaceShipOne* is released from *White Knight* and blasts upward.

4 *SpaceShipOne* reenters Earth's atmosphere.

5 TOUCHDOWN! *SpaceShipOne* glides to a smooth landing about an hour and a half later.

1 UP, UP, AND AWAY! *SpaceShipOne* is lifted off the runway in the Mojave Desert in California by the carrier plane *White Knight*.

TAKEOFF

LANDING

Flight Path of *SpaceShipOne*



FLYING HIGH: Pilot Brian Binnie waves an American flag atop *SpaceShipOne* after his team captured the \$10 million prize.

landing on the desert runway. Thousands of people gathered to watch the mission, which Binnie described as “fantastic.”

To win the \$10 million prize, the spacecraft's team had to meet several requirements. The craft had to reach the edge of space twice within a two-week period and carry the weight of three people, including the pilot. *SpaceShipOne* beat out 26 teams that had entered to compete for the prize.

History in the Making

In December 1903, the Wright brothers launched the age of **aviation**, or flight. They made the world's first powered flight in Kitty Hawk, North Carolina.

Flash-forward a little more than a century later, and a new milestone in aviation history has been reached. “This is the true frontier of transportation,” Marion Blakey, the head of the Federal Aviation Administration, told The

Associated Press. “It feels a little bit like Kitty Hawk must have.”

Tickets to Space

What does the future hold? A British airline owner wants his company to use *SpaceShipOne* technology to take paying tourists into space by 2007.

Officials say the flights of *SpaceShipOne* marked the beginning of the space tourism industry. “Today, history was made,” said Peter Diamandis, the founder of the Ansari X Prize. “We’re at the birth of a new era [in spaceflight.]”

• THINK CRITICALLY

Would you want to travel as a space tourist? Why or why not?

Copyright of *Weekly Reader - Edition 4* is the property of *Weekly Reader Corporation* and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.