

NASA's shuttle Atlantis rolls back out to launch pad

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. - Space shuttle Atlantis is back at its launch pad at NASA's Kennedy Space Center, Fla. Teams are preparing Atlantis for its mission, STS-117, to the International Space Station. Launch is targeted for June 8. Atlantis rolled out of Kennedy's Vehicle Assembly Building at 5:02 a.m. EDT Tuesday on a massive crawler transporter. Traveling less than 1 mph, the journey ended with Atlantis atop the launcher pedestals at Launch Pad 39-A at 11:47 a.m. The total trip time was six hours and 45 minutes. Electrical and mechanical connections of Atlantis to the launch pad are under way. With the refurbishment of Pad 39-A, this launch will be the first from the pad in four years. Atlantis originally was targeted for launch in March, but a hail storm damaged foam insulation on the shuttle's external fuel tank and forced managers to roll the spacecraft back into the Vehicle Assembly Building to make repairs. Atlantis' payload, consisting of the S3/S4 truss, will be installed into the shuttle's payload bay on Wednesday. Beginning May 23, propellants will be loaded into Atlantis' storage tanks. The propellant will be used by the orbital maneuvering system and reaction control system to move the spacecraft while it is in orbit. The flight readiness review meeting, where the official launch date is scheduled, will be held May 30-31 at Kennedy. For a launch on June 8 at 7:37 p.m., the 43-hour countdown would begin on June 5. STS-117 Commander Rick Sturckow, Pilot Lee Archambault and mission specialists Jim Reilly, Patrick Forrester, Steven Swanson, John "Danny" Olivas and Clay Anderson are scheduled to arrive at Kennedy on June 4. During their 11-day mission, the astronauts will work with the space station crew and ground teams to install the girder-like S3/S4 truss segment, unfold a new set of solar arrays and retract one array on the starboard side of the station. STS-117's terminal countdown demonstration test, which is a launch dress rehearsal, was held in February and will not need to be repeated.

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