

SpaceX conducts return-to-flight launch, attempts rocket landing on earth

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Washington: Private US space firm SpaceX has conducted its first rocket launch since a June failure that destroyed its cargo ship bound for the ISS and then safely landed the rocket's first stage back at the launch site.

The California-based company's Falcon 9 rocket lifted off at 8.29 p.m. (local time) on Monday from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station in Florida, delivering 11 satellites to low-Earth orbit for the US satellite communications company ORBCOMM, Xinhua reported.

But more attention may be on SpaceX's first attempt to land the rocket's first stage back on the Earth, although the company itself described the landing as "a secondary test objective."

A live webcast by SpaceX showed people watching the launch broke into loud cheers and applause as the white portion of the rocket touched down in the darkness 10 minutes after lift-off.

All "11 satellites deployed to target orbit and Falcon has landed back at Cape Canaveral," SpaceX CEO Elon Musk tweeted. "Welcome back, baby!"

ORBCOMM chief executive officer Marc Eisenberg called it a "bullseye" landing via Twitter.

The US space agency NASA retweeted a posting from SpaceX, writing: "Congratulations @SpaceX on your successful vertical landing of the first stage back on Earth!"

Previously, SpaceX has tried several times to land its rocket booster on a drone ship in the ocean, but all attempts failed. The new landing mission was actually easier than the drone ship idea.

SpaceX is focusing on cheap space travel and rocket landing is one of the company's first steps aimed at building fully reusable rockets, which will drastically reduce the cost of spaceflight. Currently, rockets are built only for one-time use.

SpaceX's new landing attempt came about one month after Blue Origin, another private US space firm started by Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, successfully landed its New Shepard booster back at its launch site in western Texas.

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