



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Huge SpaceX Rocket Launches in Test Flight, then Explodes Minutes Later

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A SpaceX rocket successfully launched with the company's Starship spacecraft Thursday, but the two-part system exploded minutes later and crashed into the sea.

It was the first test flight for SpaceX's latest Super Heavy rocket, which carries a large space **capsule** on top, called Starship. The capsule is designed to one day carry astronauts and supplies to the moon and possibly Mars.

No astronauts were on board for the test flight.

The liftoff happened Thursday morning at a SpaceX launch center in the southern Texas town of Boca Chica.

SpaceX officials have described the two-part rocket ship – which stands 120 meters high – as the largest and most powerful space vehicle ever built. The vehicle is by far more powerful than any rockets built by the American space agency NASA.

The flight plan had called for the Super Heavy to separate from Starship minutes after the launch. But instead, the rocket began to **tumble** and then exploded four minutes into the flight. The combined vehicle then fell into the Atlantic Ocean's Gulf of Mexico. The spacecraft reached an altitude of nearly 32 kilometers before exploding.

The Super Heavy rocket is designed to be reusable. But for the test flight, no landings of the rocket or spacecraft were planned.

Images appeared to show that several of the 33 main engines were not firing as the rocket climbed from the launch site. There was no immediate comment from SpaceX on any engine failures.

SpaceX had hoped that, after separating, the spacecraft would continue flying and attempt to circle the world before crashing into the Pacific Ocean near Hawaii.

Even though the vehicle exploded soon after launching, SpaceX officials on the ground celebrated the fact that the rocket was able to get off the ground. The company declared the event a successful test flight.

John Insprucker is one of the leaders of SpaceX's engineering team. He said during a live webcast of the launch that the test flight would provide a wealth of important data as the company prepares for additional flight tests.

Elon Musk, the founder and chief executive of SpaceX, said on Twitter the next Starship test launch would be "in a few months." He tweeted: "Congrats @SpaceX team on an exciting test launch of Starship! Learned a lot for next test launch..."

Musk, who bought Twitter last year for \$44 billion, also heads electric carmaker Tesla.

In the weeks leading up to the flight, Musk predicted a 50-50 chance that the spacecraft would reach orbit. But he had also said he was "guaranteeing excitement" for the launch.

SpaceX's Insprucker told webcast watchers after the launch, "You never know exactly what's going to happen." He then added, "But as we promised, excitement is guaranteed and Starship gave us a rather **spectacular** end."

I'm Bryan Lynn.

The Associated Press and Reuters reported this story. Bryan Lynn adapted the reports for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

capsule – *n.* the part of a spacecraft that people ride in

thrust – *n.* upward push or force

tumble – *v.* to suddenly fall

spectacular – *adj.* extremely pleasing, exciting or surprising

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