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American Eager for 'Sports Car' Space Ride

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STAR CITY, Moscow Region — Veteran U.S. astronaut Daniel Burbank said he was eager to fly a Soyuz spacecraft to the International Space Station, likening it to a sports car and NASA's space shuttle to a big truck.

Burbank has twice flown aboard NASA's Atlantis shuttle but will make his maiden Soyuz mission to the space station on Nov. 14 from the Baikonur launchpad in Kazakhstan.

The launch is the first since NASA ended its 30-year shuttle program in July, heralding a period of several years when all 16 partners in the International Space Station will rely entirely on Russia for manned flights into orbit.

Last month's crash of an unmanned Russian spacecraft delayed the mission by a month, disrupting space station operations early on in NASA's post-shuttle era and exposing the vulnerability of having only one way for crews to reach orbit.

Burbank, 50, will head a crew that includes two first-time space flyers, Russians Anatoly

Ivanishin and Anton Shkaplerov.

"Space flight is one of the harder things that human beings have ever tried to do, and it is going to continue to be that way for quite a long time," Burbank told reporters Monday at Star City outside Moscow, where cosmonauts have trained since space pioneer Yury Gagarin a half century ago.

"To me, the Soyuz is like a sports car and the shuttle is like an 18-wheeler," he said. "I'm very much looking forward to the ride."

Flight engineer Ivanishin said space flight was "man's destiny" and well worth the risk.

"Humanity is too curious to remain tied to the Earth's gravitational pull," he said. "Sometimes we face difficulties. Sometimes we lose ships. It's sad but, thankfully, it's rare."

The Federal Space Agency said Oct. 7 that safety checks showed the rocket failure that led to the Progress ship crash was an isolated problem. An earlier investigation blamed a fuel pipe blockage.

The launch delay has left a skeleton three-person crew aboard the $100 billion space station and will force a short six-day handover between crews amid a hectic schedule to return the space station to normal operations.

The launch of a new Progress supply flight on Oct. 30 and another crewed missions on Dec. 26 will bring the station back to full operation.

To bridge the gap, members of the new team said they spent hours on video link with outgoing crew members Mike Fossum of NASA, Japan's Satoshi Furukawa and Russia's Sergei Volkov.

"They offered us a wide range of advice, often on everyday questions like how to keep clean, prepare meals and use the toilet. Such seemingly trivial things that are completely different in space," Shkaplerov said.

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