

NASA modifies launch vehicle contract

NASA is extending a contract with ATK Thiokol of Brigham City, Utah, to continue developing the first stage for the Ares I crew launch vehicle.

Ares I is the crew launch vehicle that will transport the Orion crew exploration vehicle, its crew or other small cargo payloads into low-Earth orbit. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration said the first stage will consist of a single solid rocket booster similar to those used on the space shuttle, but with a fifth motor segment added.

The upper stage will consist of a J-2X liquid hydrogen, liquid oxygen engine and the associated propellant tanks and main propulsion system.

The contract modification -- valued at \$35 million -- also provides support for an initial test flight in the spring of 2009 known as Ares I-1. NASA says that test flight will involve the use of a simulated fifth segment on the first stage motor and a simulated upper stage.

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