

# Crew complete mission to "Mars"



**Spacesuit ... crew will explore 'Mars' in real spacesuits**

IBMP/Oleg Voloshin

**SIX "astronauts" are just days away from completing a mock eight-month journey across our solar system to Mars.**

The virtual space explorers, who are really paid volunteers, have spent the last 244 days locked in a fake spaceship.

During their time on board the craft - which is actually a locked shed the size of a bus in a Moscow warehouse - the men have simulated the interplanetary cruise.

The experiment - called Mars 500- was complete with mock emergencies, scientific experiments, space food, delayed communications, and no natural light.

Three of the crew are Russian while the rest consist of men from France, Italy and China.

They can only shower once a week and receive emails and video messages from their family on delay as they move "further away" from Earth.

They also eat canned food similar to that eaten on the International Space Station.

The crew's mission control - based at a research centre in Moscow - said that the "ship" finally reached "Mars" on Monday and has begun orbiting the red planet.

If all goes to plan the landing vehicle - another metal capsule - will touch down on a fake sand

surface of Mars on February 12.

Three of the crew will stay behind on the "spaceship" - a 1970s Soviet space training installation - while the other three land on Mars.

The men will spend two days researching the mock Mars before starting their eight month journey home.

The crew - who are being paid around £64,000 for the work - are expected to return to "Earth" on November 5 this year after an estimated 520 days locked up.

Boris Morukov, the mission controller and a former astronaut, said: "It will be very tough on the boys because of the monotony.

"The fatigue and the thought that the mission is over can be fraught with negative consequences."

The aim of the trip is to learn more about the physical and psychological demands of long-distance space travel.

Women were not included in the crew in order to reduce sexual tension.

A real manned journey to Mars won't happen for decades due to massive costs, safety concerns and technological challenges.

But despite those hurdles, both Nasa and the European Space Agency have pencilled in 2030 to 2040 as a target to put a man on Mars.

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