

Mars 500 Crew Breaks Isolation Record, But Lonely Astronauts Don't Leave Earth

The European Space Agency isolation experiment is coming to a close with only 81 days left out of 520, while breaking longest record for space mission isolation.

By James Mulroy

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Astronaut Diego tumbling over during Mars spacewalk.

Credit: ESA Mars500

Astronauts have just broken a new record--the longest amount of time in isolation on a "space" mission--all while not having left Earth. Conducted by the [European Space Agency \(ESA\)](#), the [Mars500](#) crew is a part of a psychological and physical study on what happens to the human body and mind during an extended time in isolation.

As of August 15, the Earth-bound astronauts [were in isolation for 438 days](#), beating the "real" record holder [Valeri Vladimirovich Polyakov](#) who actually spent more than 437 days in space during one trip and 240 days in another. Polyakov spent a total over just over 678 days in space as a cosmonaut, but that was more than a decade ago. The ESA experiment hopes to gain data of isolation on the ground that they can more easily monitor.

The astronauts are living out their long stay in a small facility of 550 cubic meters (around 19,400 cubic feet) located in a Moscow parking lot, [according to the Daily Mail](#). It contains limited amenities, beds, a kitchen, a greenhouse, and a couple other facilities. The group also receives limited contact with their loved ones to simulate real space-flight (communications delays between 8 and 736 seconds depending on their distance from Earth).

During their "trip" to Mars, the group "landed" and walked on a fake Martian surface, conducted scientific experiments, exercised daily, and did other activities that astronauts would actually do in space to keep themselves occupied. They are currently on their mock return trip to Earth, and have about 81 days left as of this writing.

This long-term isolation experiment will help scientists evaluate what astronauts are capable of handling and help them design long-term space missions. They will "land" on November 5, 2011, totalling 520 days in isolation. Let's hope they don't go insane before then.

[[Daily Mail](#), [Popular Science](#)]

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