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Russia teams up with European Space Agency in bid to launch first manned mission to Mars

By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

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Just three weeks after Nasa's 30-year shuttle programme finally came to an end, it looks like the space race might already be back on.

Russia is teaming up with the European Space Agency (ESA) to launch the first manned mission to Mars.

Speaking at an air show at Zhukovsky, near Moscow, ESA chief Jean-Jacques Dordain said his agency and Roskosmos will 'carry out the first flight to Mars together'.



Joint effort: Russia is teaming up with the European Space Agency (ESA) to launch the first manned mission to Mars

No timetable has been set yet and it remains unclear on what or whose craft the astronauts would travel.

But it is thought this week's record-breaking success of the Mars500 project has boosted confidence.

That crew have now spent 442 days in isolation as they 'journey' to the Red Planet - long enough for them to have

made 73 return trips to the moon.

The cosmonauts - actually in a Moscow car park - still have 78 days left of their 520-day mission when they will enter the record books again, this time for the shortest distance travelled.

Russia's vision also extends to the growing space tourism industry, and includes a hotel in orbit, lunar sightseeing flights and luxury rides into the cosmos.

Russian firms unveiled their plans at the Zhukovsky air show, saying the race was on to build a new craft to take people into space following the retirement of Nasa's space shuttle.



It is thought this week's record-breaking success of the Mars500 project, in which the crew has spent a record 442 days in isolation on a mock journey to the Red Planet, has boosted confidence in Russia's space programme

RKK Energia unveiled plans for a replacement shuttle and Orbital Technologies said it hoped to build an orbiting hotel with room for seven guests by 2016.

Other plans include flying tourists to the dark side of the moon.

'Space tourism is a real and fast-growing business,' said Sergei Kostenko, head of Russian firm Orbital Technologies, said at the MAKS air show.

'Whoever builds the first new spaceship now will reap big dividends.'

Although Russia currently holds a monopoly on rides to space aboard its Soviet-designed Soyuz, it starts at a disadvantage.

Experts say they doubt Russian firms can achieve their ambitious goals because they lack funding and even Russian officials said it would be hard to rival U.S. private sector firms now competing for contracts with Nasa.



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Funding for the U.S. space programme is much higher and Nasa is expected to forge ahead with building a new generation of craft capable of travelling into deep space, with flights into low Earth orbit outsourced to private firms.

'The U.S. has more possibilities than us right now,' said Alexander Derechin, deputy chief designer for Russia's partly state-owned space contractor RKK Energia.

He said the U.S. had made a 'very wise decision' in planning a state-funded spaceship for deep-space flight and that Russia faced tough competition from companies such as Boeing Co and Lockheed Martin as well as start-up firms.

Mr Derechin said: 'But we must make a state-funded spaceship, though in such a way that it is also commercially competitive. It is a very difficult task.'

Places:

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