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Virgin Galactic Won't Be Going into Space... Just Yet
By John Hopton - October 14, 2017

Virgin Galactic founder Richard Branson recently said he'd be "very disappointed" if he didn't go into space within the next six months, and it now looks like he will indeed be disappointed. However, his dream is far from over - it may just take a little longer to achieve.

Things are in motion at Virgin Galactic, with president Mike Moses stating that within three months, one of its SpaceShipTwo suborbital vehicles should be taken more than 50 miles (80 kilometers) above the Earth, carried by a large aircraft named WhiteKnightTwo.

SpaceShipTwo is intended to be first and foremost a passenger vehicle - it just won't have any passengers on it at this time.

Reporting from the International Symposium for Personal and Commercial Spaceflight (ISPCS) taking place this month, Space.com quoted Moses as saying: "Richard always poses a challenge. He likes to push very hard."

He joked: "Sometimes, I wish he wouldn't talk so much," to laughter from the audience. "But three months is about right. We hope to be in space by the end of this year. He's a little bit further away [from a flight] than that."

Virgin Galactic

Richard Branson has waited a long time to realise his space ambitions; Source: Pravs World

Virgin Galactic's long wait for success

Branson's space ambitions are long held and much delayed. The Virgin America boss first said he would have tourists in space by 2007. The latest, most realistic timeframe is now to have tourists, and Branson, in space by the end of 2018.

Glide tests of a SpaceShipTwo vehicle called VSS Unity have been undertaken, with the craft being flown without an engine and attached to WhiteKnightTwo. Powered tests (with an engine) are still planned for this year.

"We're going to do the powered program just like we did the glide program," Moses said. "The first thing you want to do is kind of predict what you're going to see, fly it, make sure you got what you thought so you know that your prediction for the step after that is right. We'll take our time with it. We're going to fly when we're ready."

Space tourism doesn't come cheap

Two further SpaceShipTwo vehicles are also currently under construction, and according to Moses, Virgin Galactic the spacecrafts' cabin shells are completed

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already. Installing the various systems (such as electrical) into the cabins will be the next step.

“The skeletons of our next two spaceships are well on their way,” Moses explained. “The next step is to start assembling the wings and the fuselages and then bring those parts together. It’s going to take a year to a year and a half for these vehicles to come online. ... We really do want a fleet of spacecraft.”

Richard Branson moved from records to airlines – space should be next. Source: Virgin America

The company could offer lower ticket prices for suborbital flights if multiple vehicles are used, Moses said. Around 700 tickets costing \$250,000 each have been pre-sold before a sales freeze last year, so space tourism at this time does not come cheaply.

“By having multiple ships, we can fly multiple times. It drops our overhead, and that really lets us open the market up and drop those prices down,” Moses explained. “The real vision is to democratize access to space. And the price point is a part of that. We need to get those price points down. Space is expensive. You need to do what you need to do, but I think we’ll drive them down.”