

Virgin Galactic's Mike Moses talks about spaceflight plan: 'We're going to fly when we're ready'

The company is aiming for powered flights by the end of 2017.

By Shubham Sharma

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Virgin Galactic's recently promoted president, Mike Moses has given more insights into the company's plan of flying passengers into space and maintaining a fleet of spaceplanes.

Speaking at the International Symposium for Personal and Commercial Spaceflight (ISPCS), Moses said the company was planning to make first powered flights by the end this year, but they would not fly any passengers – including founder Richard Branson – in less than six months.

The remark from Moses comes days after Branson said, "We will hopefully be in space in three months, maybe six months before I'm in space" while speaking at the Nordic Business Forum (NBF) in Helsinki.

"Richard always poses a challenge. He likes to push very hard. Sometimes, I wish he wouldn't talk so much," Moses was quoted as saying by Space News. "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 than that."

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Virgin Galactic has been aiming for space tourism since 2004. The company plans to fly paying passengers into space with its reusable suborbital spaceplane VSS Unity, but the progress has been delayed over the years. In 2014, the spacefaring giant suffered a major setback when its original spaceplane VSS Enterprise broke apart during a test flight.

Since then, the company has been working to get VSS Unity ready for its first spaceflight with all safety measures in place. The vehicle, which will be carried up to an altitude of 50,000ft on a



massive aircraft, has already completed a number of glide tests and will start powered flights (with engine) this year. It eyes to take passengers into space before the end of 2018.

"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."

Apart from powered flights, Moses also highlighted Virgin Galactic's plan of setting up a fleet of spaceplanes – a factor which he expects will bring the prices of their space trip tickets down. The company charges \$250,000 (£190,000 approx) per person for a two-and-a-half hour trip (with six minutes of weightlessness) and has already sold some 700 tickets till now.

Moses believes this could go considerably down when they'll have multiple space planes in operation. "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."

For now, the space boss for the company said their next two spaceplanes are in the works, with their skeletons ready and assembly of the wings and the fuselages starting soon. "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."

