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# Apollo 10: The Fastest Voyage Past the Moon

## Description

The spacecraft plunged out of the lunar darkness towards Earth, where three men were about to make history as the fastest humans ever. Inside the command module, they felt no sensation of speed. The stars and Earth's distant curve were visible through the windows, but there were no instruments to show their exact velocity. Instead, the crew focused on their tasks, and engineers would later calculate their speed from recorded data.

Upon re-entering the atmosphere, the capsule was travelling at 36,397 feet per second, which is approximately 39,937 kilometres per hour. This record was set on 26 May 1969 and has not been broken because no mission has attempted to exceed it since.

The crew comprised Thomas Stafford, mission commander; John Young, command module pilot; and Eugene Cernan, lunar module pilot. All three were officers in the United States military. Apollo 10 was the fourth crewed mission in NASA's lunar programme, designed as a practice run for the first Moon landing. Launched on 18 May 1969, it tested procedures and equipment for lunar landings but did not land on the surface.

During the mission, Stafford and Cernan piloted the lunar module, Snoopy, while Young remained in orbit. After re-docking, they jettisoned the lunar module and returned to Earth, accelerating due to the Moon's gravity. The fastest speed was reached during atmospheric re-entry, where Cernan described the experience as being enveloped in flames.

NASA's Artemis programme aims to send humans back to the Moon. The Orion spacecraft will experience similar re-entry speeds. Artemis III, scheduled for 2026, may achieve speeds comparable to those of the Apollo 10 crew.

## CATEGORY

1. Sci/Tech - LEVEL4

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