

ULA's Vulcan Rocket Faces New Booster Issue Before Launch

Description

Moments after its launch from Florida's Space Coast on Thursday morning, United Launch Alliance's Vulcan rocket displayed a dramatic shower of sparks in its exhaust plume. Shortly thereafter, the rocket twisted briefly but recovered, continuing its ascent into orbit with military satellites from the United States.

This incident is reminiscent of a similar issue that occurred sixteen months ago, when a Vulcan rocket lost a booster nozzle shortly after launch from Cape Canaveral. Despite that problem, the rocket was able to regain control and reach its intended orbit.

Details regarding the booster issue from Thursday remain vague. An investigation is currently in progress, as confirmed by ULA, a partnership between Boeing and Lockheed Martin. The circumstances bear similarities to the previous booster malfunction from October 2024. Close-up video from the launch revealed a fiery plume near the throat of one of the rocket's four solid-fuel boosters. This area connects the motor's propellant casing to the exhaust nozzle, where super-hot gas is channeled to generate thrust.

The unusual plume appeared less than thirty seconds after liftoff at 4:22 am EST (09:22 UTC). A minute into the flight, the rocket emitted sparks and debris, which was followed by a sudden rolling motion. Ultimately, the four booster rockets burned out and were discarded into the Atlantic Ocean, with ULA stating the rest of the mission proceeded smoothly.

Gary Wentz, ULA's vice president for Atlas and Vulcan programs, confirmed that the team noticed a significant performance anomaly early in the flight. However, despite this issue, the Vulcan booster and Centaur delivered the spacecraft to its geosynchronous orbit. A combined team from the US government and contractors is analysing technical data and imagery while forming a recovery team for debris collection. A thorough investigation will determine the root cause and necessary corrective measures prior to the next Vulcan mission.

Vocabulary List:

1. **Launched** /lɔ:nʃt/ (verb): To send or propel a spacecraft into the air.
2. **Unusual** /ʌn'ju:ʒu.əl/ (adjective): Not common rare or unexpected.
3. **Ascent** /ə'sent/ (noun): The act of rising or climbing upwards.
4. **Preceded** /prɪ'si:dɪd/ (verb): To come before something in time or order.
5. **Anomaly** /ə'noməli/ (noun): Something that deviates from what is standard normal or expected.
6. **Investigation** /ɪn'vestri'geɪʃən/ (noun): The process of examining or inquiring into a matter to uncover facts.

CATEGORY

1. Sci/Tech - LEVEL5



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