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Virgin Galactic: Year of the Spaceship



“2008 really will be the Year of the Spaceship,” said Sir Richard Branson, at Virgin Galactic’s unveiling of WhiteKnightTwo and SpaceShipTwo in New York in January. The WhiteKnightTwo (WK2) mothership, or carrier aircraft, is expected to begin flight testing this summer. It is the world’s largest, all-carbon-composite aircraft and is capable of launching SpaceShipTwo and its eight astronauts into sub-orbital space flight.

Branson’s aim is to “allow thousands of people to realise their dreams” and “transform human access to space”. The group of future space tourists hoping to take a \$200,000 flight has now grown to well in excess of 200 individuals, according to Virgin Galactic. Those who want to reserve a place on the trip of a lifetime can do so at www.virgingalactic.com - but a pre-payment of \$20,000 is required.





After that, passengers require medical assessment and centrifuge training at the NASTAR facility in Philadelphia. Already, 80 of SpaceShipTwo's first passengers have been through their 'G Force acclimatisation programme', in which the participants were spun to 3.5GZ (head to toe) and 6GX (front to back) to simulate the actual flight profile of SpaceShipTwo during a 110km (68-mile) sub-orbital space flight.



But Branson also pointed out, correctly in our opinion, that not only does the space programme herald a new era in the history of mankind, it has also resulted in the creation of "something which is breathtakingly beautiful".

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Photos: Virgin Galactic*

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