

# Next space trip could be a winner

## SpaceShipOne revs up to make \$10M and history

By Traci Watson  
USA TODAY

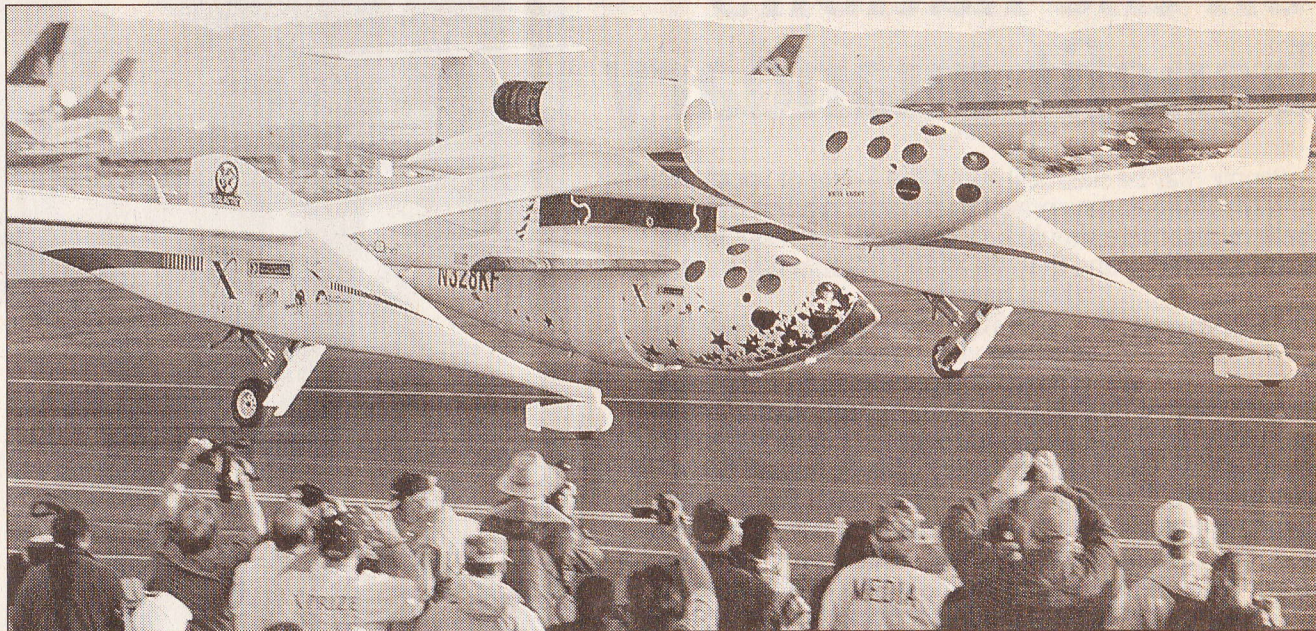
MOJAVE, Calif. — SpaceShipOne, the world's first privately developed spaceship, is fueled and ready to embark this morning on a flight into space in a bid to claim the \$10 million Ansari X Prize.

A carrier plane is expected to lift the spaceship off a runway here at 10 a.m. ET. After the two craft reach 50,000 feet in altitude, SpaceShipOne will break away, fire its rocket and attempt to break the edge of space, 62 miles above Earth.

The attempt comes five days after the ship went on a harrowing ride into space. During its ascent on Wednesday, SpaceShipOne and its pilot, Mike Melvill, went into a series of 30 wingtip-over-wingtip rolls — terrifying spectators on the ground — before Melvill leveled the craft and brought it safely back to Earth.

It was uncertain late Sunday whether Melvill will pilot the ship today. The ship's backers planned to announce the identity of the pilot today.

If today's flight is successful, the backers can claim the \$10 million award known as the Ansari X Prize. It is offered by the X Prize Foundation, a non-profit group that wants to encourage the development of a private space industry and space tourism. To win the prize, a privately developed craft must make two successful



By Laura Rauch, AP

**Ready:** SpaceShipOne will attempt to reach space for the second time in less than a week. The developers could win \$10 million.

flights within 14 days carrying three people or a pilot and 400 pounds of cargo.

Despite the problems Melvill had during Wednesday's flight, he was able to guide SpaceShipOne into space and qualify the flight as a successful first trip.

The entrepreneurs who developed SpaceShipOne decided to go for the prize today despite what happened Wednesday. After the flight, Melvill and Burt Rutan, the ship's designer and an aerospace pioneer, downplayed the series of rolls. And during the weekend, Rutan posted a notice on his Web site that said the vehicle "never saw any significant structural stresses"

that could have torn it apart.

SpaceShipOne also rolled, though only slightly, during its test flight into space June 21. Separately, a system used to control the spacecraft's orientation failed during that flight. Melvill, who was the pilot during that flight too, later told *The New York Times* that he "was deathly afraid" during part of the trip.



AFP

**Rutan:** Designed the spacecraft.

Several dozen other private teams are developing spaceships, but none is close to winning the prize, which has been unclaimed for eight years.

The prize would help offset the \$20 million-plus cost of developing SpaceShipOne. The costs were paid by Microsoft



By Adrienne Lewis, USA TODAY



Follow the quest for the Ansari X Prize at [tech.usatoday.com](http://tech.usatoday.com)

A ride on one would cost roughly \$200,000, far less than the alternative. The Soyuz spacecraft owned by the Russian government is the only craft to have taken tourists into space. American financier Dennis Tito paid \$20 million to take it to the space station in April 2001.

Branson's passengers, like the pilot of SpaceShipOne, would experience only a few minutes of weightlessness. That's because SpaceShipOne and its spinoffs are not designed to orbit the Earth, which is much more difficult and dangerous than slipping briefly into space.

co-founder Paul Allen, Rutan's partner in the project.

Allen's expenses also will be defrayed by a deal announced last week to build a fleet of vehicles similar to SpaceShipOne to carry tourists into space. The ships will be owned and operated by Richard Branson, owner of Virgin Atlantic Airways.