



NASA Preps to Load Cargo Onto Space Shuttle Endeavour

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NASA technicians are scheduled to start loading up the space shuttle Endeavour Friday with the cargo it will carry to the International Space Station.

These items - known as the payload - include an Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer (AMS), a particle physics detector designed to search for various types of unusual matter by measuring cosmic rays, and the Express Logistics Carrier-3, a platform with spare parts that will sustain station operations once the shuttles are retired later this year. Also included is a high-pressure gas tank and spare parts for the Dextre space robot.

Endeavour is not scheduled to launch until April 19, but preparation has been underway for some time. On March 10 - the same day the space shuttle Discovery returned to Earth - NASA technicians started rolling Endeavour out to the launch pad. Moving the payload to the launch pad, meanwhile, started on Monday and arrived early Tuesday morning. After inspections and some careful maneuvering this week, technicians are ready to start loading Endeavour's cargo bay today.

NASA said it expects to complete the attachment of key payload components by Saturday.

While this is going on, mission specialists Michael Fincke and Greg Chamitoff today are in the Neutral Buoyancy Laboratory in Houston practicing for the mission's fourth and final spacewalk.

The mission, known as [STS-134](#), will last 14 days and will be led by Commander Mark Kelly, husband of Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot at an Arizona shopping mall in January. In the wake of that tragedy, NASA selected astronaut Rick Sturckow as a backup commander in case Kelly had to stay with his wife. However, Giffords improved rapidly and was moved to a rehab facility near NASA mission control in Houston, so Kelly decided in early February that he will make the trip on Endeavour. Giffords will reportedly attend the launch.

Kelly's twin brother [Scott](#) is also an astronaut and recently returned from the ISS.

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