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2005 Innovator of the Year profile: Rocketplane Ltd.

4/1/2005

Rocketplane Limited is working on an innovation that will take you out of this world - literally.

Under the leadership of owner George French, Rocketplane is developing a suborbital vehicle that will take civilians more than 62 miles above Earth's atmosphere to experience the sensation of weightlessness and an extraordinary view of Earth from space. The company expects to begin offering flights on Rocketplane XP in 2007.

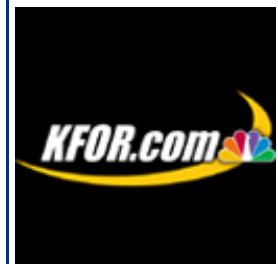
In addition, the reusable launch vehicle will also carry scientific experiments into space to perform zero-gravity research or develop and qualify experiments for use on the International Space Station. The Rocketplane also will provide a platform for Earth observation for military, agricultural and environmental purposes.

While numerous companies throughout the United States and Canada are involved in similar development programs, Rocketplane's XP program is believed to be the only company in Oklahoma working on this type of program.

"Our vehicle is unique in that it more resembles a business jet than what you would envision as a suborbital space vehicle. It is also the only one, to our knowledge, that will take off and climb to elevation on its conventional jet engines prior to the rocket ignition that will propel it to 330,000 feet (62 miles) for a spectacular view of the Earth and the experience of weightlessness," said Mike Elder, Rocketplane business manager.

The projected cost for flights has not been set, but we expect it to be in the range of \$150,000 per seat. Current plans are for Rocketplane to build and operate a fleet of three vehicles.

Spirit Wing Aviation will be performing the fabrication services in a dedicated hangar at the Guthrie/Edmond Regional Airport, under the direction of Rocketplane's manufacturing manager and involvement of its design team.



Rocketplane operations include a hangar at the Oklahoma Spaceport at Burns Flat and engineering offices in Oklahoma City. The company currently employs 25, but expects to create 100 jobs by 2007.

"Half of these would be Rocketplane employees involved in the space flight operations or other development programs. The other half would be jobs in other support industries generated by Rocketplane's activities," Elder said. "The future appears very exciting with several other projects currently under negotiation, requiring a different class of space vehicle than the XP, and providing services to other markets."

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