

NASA formally awards Orion test flight contract to Lockheed Martin

NASA, as expected, awarded Lockheed Martin Corp. a \$370 million sole source contract to conduct a test flight of its new Orion crew vehicle in 2014.

The agency in November 2011 signaled its intent to award the contract. In a justification notice for the sole source award last Thursday, NASA said only Lockheed Martin could meet its requirements for the unmanned test flight. The company is developing Orion to carry astronauts to the moon and possibly Mars under an \$8 billion contract.

Boeing Co. and Space Exploration Technologies of Hawthorne, Calif., both responded to the contract notice, but offered only launch services and not a complete test of Orion and its systems, according to NASA.

The space agency said in the award notice Orion will orbit the earth twice during the test, followed by re-entry. The exercise will help evaluate parts of the vehicle that pose the highest risk to mission success and crew survivability, including parachutes, heat shield, forward bay cover, thermal protection system and flight software.

Joshua Byerly, a NASA spokesman at the Johnson Space Flight Center in Houston, said the agency has not yet selected a date for the Orion test flight but is aiming for early in 2014.
