

PART 1 PREPARING FOR LAUNCH

P1 T1 VLOG 1

Propellant loading....

Hi Everyone. Here I am; Tazz Anderson, a Geologist with a job to do. I've rattled up the tower in the elevator then crawled down through a hatch which they've sealed behind me. My ear defenders will help muffle the boom. The whole of the inside is no bigger than a large family car. And here's me, wedged low down at the base of the cockpit in my space suit with its own oxygen supply, studying all the familiar panels and displays.

Systems propulsion.... GO!

Vehicle electrical.... GO!

Flight transmission system.... GO!

The launchpad has been busy with people since dawn but now, at 3 in the afternoon, there's no one in sight because they are enforcing the exclusion zone. I don't feel alone though; I'm in constant contact with the ground through my friendly onboard computer MIC. MIC stands for Multioperation Inflight Computer.

Are you comfortable Tazz?

No!

Sorry to hear that

That's OK, MIC. It's not your fault.

When I talk to MIC, I'm looking at a monitor with a yellow smiley face. The Tec team have made a cool graphic of a moving mouth which does make him seem more like a human.

I'm glad you think so, Tazz

Your tuneful voice sounds a bit like my Uncle Hugo; he's quite posh.

Hundreds of people are watching back at UK Space Agency and online in schools; camera lenses are trained on this moment. I feel as if the planet is holding its breath to see the smallest ant, (me!), daring to climb up the tower, squeeze myself inside a spaceship and blast away.

I've eaten a simple last-day-on- Earth meal: cereal, eggs, a peach, before leaving quarantine where I've spent the past 5 days. My family could only talk to me from behind a glass screen to avoid passing on any illnesses. I wasn't even allowed a final hug with my Shetland Sheepdog, Puzzle. Ed, my back-up, stayed there with me. He will take over the mission if I have to pull out. But that's never going to happen. Sorry Ed!

Thanks for subscribing to my Vlog. I'll describe as much as I can for you. There's a webcam trained on me the whole time. It will pick up everything I say, even if I turn my back. We can't give you video all the time; the visuals would go fuzzy. So, you will see mainly Space pictures from the archive and get extra information on the trip with just occasional live footage of yours truly.

We have a clear day for launch; good visibility, the wind has dropped. There's a window of half an hour for the launch to work otherwise they would have to abort it. That means I must take off within that period for weather and engine reasons. But now the countdown is about to start. Please don't let them find a tiny malfunction that makes everything stop.

I brought with me three little origami birds printed with red and yellow flowers. I've tied them with thread just beside the fuel gauges where I can watch them. You'll see why later on.

We don't have many countdowns in our lives, do we? Maybe Christmas. How many sleeps to go? Or a holiday, or a party. It's things we are excited about...we can't wait for them to happen. That sounds about right then.

I feel pretty warm in here, MIC.

The heat regulation system in your suit should be operative, Tazz. Your blood pressure is a little raised.

Ok. It's probably just the excitement.

They didn't use to design suits for women but this one has been made specially for me; snug like a wellington boot but around the whole of me, not just my feet. I have to sit with my knees squashed up. I'm already longing to stretch. Sometimes, when a kid is little, their mums and dads countdown to force them to do something, don't they? There's danger in a countdown; if you don't get that room tidied, this bad punishment will happen.

There's danger today, of course. But there's calm at the heart of me.

GO FOR LAUNCH

Ignition sequence is starting.....

Thanks MIC

30 seconds and counting.....

The smaller engines must be lighting.

Affirmative

Out of the window, there's the launch platform, like a complex system of white ladders, that will fall away. I know I'm high up in the cone of the rocket but because this space is so cramped, I can't believe that's where I am- the huge force rumbling below me sounds like the revving of a crowd of motorbikes. The vibration mounts.

In my head I am already gone.

I breathe, brace myself, listen to the rumble..... louder....louder.

T minus 15 seconds

I'm forced down into my seat, as if an invisible hand has hold of me.

10...9...8

I'm jerked to the left, then right. The juddering gets more violent. The tower will be falling away. The whole cockpit shakes.

I'm sweating.

Readings for fuel pressure, steering and propellant flow flash before my eyes.

7...6...5

The people I love will be forever counting down...until they see me again.....

I'm a cork about to shoot from a bottle...forward...breathe

4...3...2

The air roars

I slam back

Lift off

Blue sky switches to black. Lights drift towards me: blobs, clusters