

# Artemis II kicks off 10-day lunar mission

**KENNETH CHANG**

**Florida:** A towering orange-and-white Nasa rocket blasted off from Florida on Wednesday evening, lifting four astronauts towards space and transporting spectators' imaginations to a future in which Americans may again set foot on the moon.

As they did during the heyday of the Apollo programme, which first put men on the lunar surface, spectators squeezed onto the beaches along Central Florida's Space Coast. The crowds cheered when the powerful rocket launched into the clear sky at 6.35pm (local time). It travelled eastward, over the Atlantic Ocean, on a journey that will take astronauts around the moon but not land there.

The flight aboard a spacecraft named Integrity is taking Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen on what is expected to be a round trip of more than 11,18,494.08km to clear a path for more exploration, a new lunar landing, eventually a sustained human presence on the moon, and journeys farther out into the solar system.



**The Nasa rocket lifts off from the Kennedy Space Centre in Cape Canaveral, Florida, on Wednesday. (Reuters)**

The last time astronauts travelled that far was Apollo 17, in December 1972.

"After a brief 54-year intermission, Nasa is back in the business of sending astronauts to the moon," Jared Isaacman, the Nasa administrator, said during a news conference after the launch.

The mission, known as Artemis II, is the 21st century equivalent of Apollo 8, when Nasa astronauts Frank Borman, James Lovell and William Anders captured the attention of the world. When

they launched in December 1968, it was the first time that astronauts rode on top of the mighty Saturn V rocket.

Unlike the Apollo astronauts, who were all white men, this mission sets a number of firsts: Glover of Nasa will be the first Black man to venture into deep space and Koch of Nasa will be the first woman to do so. Hansen of the Canadian Space Agency will be the first person on a moon mission who is not an American.

On Thursday, Orion will fire its engines to push it on a path towards the moon. On Monday, it will reach the moon and swing around, passing over the far side. The astronauts will spend hours making observations of the lunar surface, including portions of the far side that have never been seen by human eyes before.

As it passes behind the moon, Artemis will set a distance record for the farthest that any humans have travelled from Earth: 406840.55km or 6669.12km farther than the Apollo 13 astronauts travelled when they had to make an emergency return to Earth.

New York Times News Service