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UK's first satellite launch fails to make it into orbit

20 hours ago

The mission was attempted by British billionaire Richard Branson's Virgin Orbit, which has successfully completed four similar launches from the US.

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The UK attempted its first orbital space launch from UK soil on Monday evening, making it the privately-owned Virgin Orbit's first international launch. However, it failed when a reported "anomaly" early Tuesday prevented the rocket from reaching orbit.

The repurposed Virgin Atlantic Boeing 747 aircraft, named "Cosmic Girl" took off from Cornwall in southwestern England at around 10:15 pm local time (2215 GMT) and released the rocket around an hour into flight over the Atlantic Ocean, toward the south of Ireland.

However, Virgin Orbit said it appeared to have an "anomaly" in a satellite launch, saying it had prevented the rocket from reaching orbit. "We are evaluating the information," it said.

The rocket was carrying nine small satellites and was dubbed "Start Me Up," as in the Rolling Stones song.

A crowd of around 2,000 people attended the takeoff in Cornwall.

The nine satellites the rocket was set to bring into orbit had to be used for both civil and defense purposes.

The first in the UK and Western Europe

operation centers for satellite telecommunication companies.

"So we have the full spectrum except launch," Annett told the Reuters news agency. "If you have launch, you have everything."

Previously in 2022 and 2021, Virgin Orbit launched four similar missions from California after **[some failed attempts](#)**.

National pride or ground for military escalation?

Apart from NASDAQ-listed Virgin Orbit, state bodies such as the UK Space Agency, the Royal Air Force and Cornwall Council are also collaborating on the mission. It was originally planned for late last year, but technical and regulatory issues pushed back the date.

In the past century, satellite missions were exclusively launched by national space agencies. Recent years have seen growing private sector initiatives.

Virgin Orbit acknowledged on its website that the mission was enabled by the UK Space Agency funding. The company, founded by British billionaire Richard Branson, said the launch would "meet a key ambition of the UK Government's National Space Strategy."

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