

Brazilian Astronaut Gave Up Nasa to Celebrate Dumont's Pioneer Flight

Contributed by Cecilia Jorge
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The Brazilian Space Agency (Agência Espacial Brasileira) (AEB) is in a race against time to complete its preparations for the flight of Air Force lieutenant colonel Marcos Pontes.

At the end of March, Pontes will be the first Brazilian to go into space when he travels on a Russia Soyuz rocket to the International Space Station.

The reason for the rush is that it was only four months ago that arrangements were made for Pontes to go up with the Russians. Before that, he was training with NASA to travel aboard the space shuttle.

But shuttle accidents have pushed the date for his trip back to the point where he was in danger of not making it into space this year - the 100th anniversary of Santo Dumont's pioneer flight.

According to Raimundo Mussi, at AEB who is the flight manager, Pontes will be in space for eight days during which time he will undertake seven experiments created by Brazilian scientists and school children.

The experiments created by school children will be used to stimulate interest in space among young Brazilians.

Next week a critical point will be reached: the equipment for the experiments will be weighed. Pontes has a strict baggage weight limit of 15 kilos (33 lbs).

The Brazilian space program has some experience with microgravity experiments in Brazilian rockets that have achieved suborbital flights of up to eight minutes.

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