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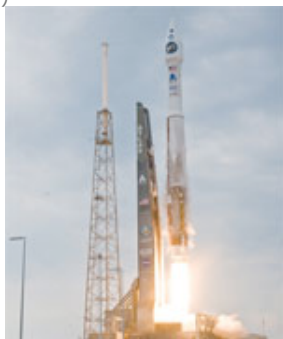
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# Atlas launches lunar missions

Posted: Fri, Jun 19, 2009, 6:46 AM ET (1046 GMT)

An Atlas 5 rocket successfully launched a pair of NASA missions to study the Moon, the first US lunar missions in a decade. The Atlas 5 401 lifted off at 5:32 pm EDT (2132 GMT) from Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and Lunar Crater Observation and Sensing Satellite (LCROSS) spacecraft. The launch was delayed 20 minutes because of weather at the Cape. LRO will arrive at the Moon four days after launch and enter a 50-kilometer polar orbit around it. The spacecraft carries cameras and other instruments to return images, spectral data, and other information about the lunar surface and environment. LCROSS, which remained attached to the rocket's Centaur upper stage, will take a slower trip to the Moon, gradually widening its orbit until it is on an impact trajectory with the Moon in early October. LCROSS will separate from the Centaur and observe its impact on the Moon before it itself collides with it.



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