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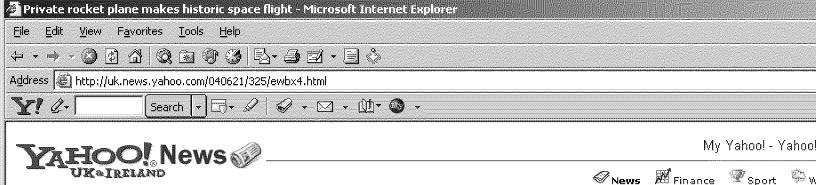
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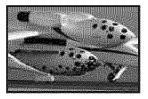




Monday June 21, 05:44 PM

Private rocket plane makes historic space flight

By Reed Stevenson



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MOJAVE, California (Reuters) - The privately funded rocket plane SpaceShipOne has flown to outer space and into history books as the world's first commercial manned space flight.

The distinctive white rocket plane was released from a larger plane called the White Knight and ignited its rocket engine to enter space 62 miles (100 km) above the earth on Mondaγ.

Against the backdrop of a clear blue sky, it landed safely back at a runway in the Mojave Desert in California, about 100 miles (160 km) north of Los Angeles.

"The colours were pretty staggering from up there," said pilot Michael Melvill, who also earned his wings, officially, as an astronaut. "It was almost a religious experience."



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Melvill said he could see the black expanse of outer space, the curvature of the earth and a broad swathe of the Southern California coast during his three and half minutes just beyond earth's atmosphere.

The unprecedented \$20 million (11 million pound) project was intended to demonstrate the viability of commercial space flight and open the door for space tourism.

REUTERS



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