

(Anthony, J., 2020b)

P **First New Zealand-made operational satellite sent into orbit, Rocket Lab says**

John Anthony · 10:05, Sep 04 2020



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First Light is the first operational satellite Rocket Lab has designed, built and launched into orbit.

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PC **Space company Rocket Lab says it's sent New Zealand's first operational satellite into orbit.**

The satellite dubbed 'First Light' is Rocket Lab's first in-house designed and built operational satellite.

First Light, manufactured largely in New Zealand, was sent to orbit on Rocket Lab's fourteenth mission of its rocket Electron from its launch site on the Mahia Peninsula on August 31.

The satellite was deployed as part of another satellite mission called "I Can't Believe It's Not Optical" for a United States firm however, Rocket Lab kept secret that it had its own special payload on board.

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More views from First Light, Rocket Lab's first Photon satellite in orbit.

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About 60 minutes after lift-off its Electron rocket deployed a 100 kilogram microsatellite for Capella Space, an action that would typically signal the successful completion of a standard Rocket Lab mission.

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However, shortly after deploying the payload, Rocket Lab conducted an entirely new operation for the first time.

Engineers sent a command to activate Kick Stage, a powerful extra stage, where its Photon spacecraft transitions into a satellite to continue a standalone mission.

Rocket Lab has deployed the first New Zealand-built satellite into orbit. The satellite called "First Light" was deployed on August 31.

Photon, which weighs about 50kg, features deep space-capable communications, navigation technology and propulsion capable of multiple restarts on orbit.

The First Light mission is an initial demonstration of new capabilities such as power management and thermal control.

Rocket Lab is testing its systems in preparation for future planned missions in low Earth orbit, as well as to the Moon and Venus.

Rocket Lab founder and chief executive Peter Beck said the mission demonstrated that it had simplified the satellite process.

"Launching the first Photon mission marks a major turning point for space users – it's now easier to launch and operate a space mission than it has ever been," Beck said.

The Electron and Photon missions removed complexity, risk, and delays customers faced when having to build their own satellite hardware and pay for a separate launch, he said.

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