NEWS RELEASE

It Only Took A Few Months For This Satellite To Get Ready For Space

2019-05-15

The S-CLASS spacecraft images a sunrise shot from its perch in orbit. The spacecraft is a flexible platform under development by York Space Systems.
York Space Systems
A startup company's new flexible-path spacecraft system is doing well during its first few weeks in orbit. York Space Systems announced Thursday (May 16) that its S-CLASS spacecraft bus passed initial testing or commissioning. All the more remarkable: the timeline from first hardware to launch site delivery took less than 3.5 months.

The first paces for the spacecraft all completed smoothly, including communicating with the ground, deploying the solar arrays and connecting with York's secure private network from several in-field mobile locations. The company announced the commissioning success less than two weeks after the satellite's launch May 5 from New Zealand, aboard a Rocket Lab Electron booster.

It's a key first step for a company that is looking to hop on the growing smallsat trend and while making high customization available to customers. The eventual goal is to offer the S-CLASS platform in either a standard configuration, or to allow it to include different platforms or to fly to different orbits as customer needs dictate, the company said in a past interview with Forbes.

"We absolutely need to be way more responsive," said CEO Dirk Wallinger when speaking to Forbes in late March. He said that the company is working to not only customize its platform quickly in between launches, but also to do it at an affordable cost. This will allow York to create different iterations for satellite constellations, allowing those

groups to evolve quickly from launch to launch, he said. The low-cost iterations will also, ideally, open the company up to a variety of small companies and organizations interested in participating in spaceflight.

York Space Systems' S-CLASS spacecraft platform.
JC Buck / York Space Systems

In a statement announcing the commissioning success, Wallinger added that the milestone is "a momentous occasion for York" for two reasons: the fast development timeline, and demonstrating the potential of the platform in the smallsat industry.

The S-CLASS is a three-axis stabilized platform that is designed for payloads of 188 pounds (85 kilograms) or less. With this commissioning milestone behind them, York plans to move forward with "rapid production of its platform" and to continue pursuing its goal of affordable and quick space access, the company added in the statement.

York Space Systems was founded in 2015 and as a startup space company, it only provides a select view of its financials and growth. Wallinger **previously said** that its workforce has grown to 21 people (up from 10 people) in the past 18 months alone. The company runs its operations through bootstrapping and has not yet disclosed if it plans to seek Series A funding.

"The platform for York is about demonstrating different technology," Wallinger said in the previous interview. S-CLASS can be moved to just about any orientation or inclination in orbit, allowing it to do missions ranging from polar-circling surveillance to ship traffic monitoring near the equator. Future iterations of S-CLASS could even boost missions to geosynchronous orbit, a popular location for communications satellites.