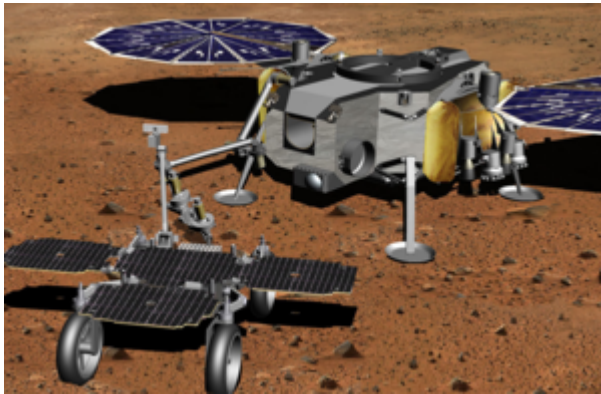


UK designing new rover to bring first samples back from Mars

News story

Airbus UK has won the next phase of the study contract to design the Sample Fetch Rover for the European Space Agency (ESA)



Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

The UK space sector has world-leading expertise in robotic space exploration, with Airbus completing the build of the 'Rosalind Franklin' rover last year.

This new contract will see UK scientists and engineers working on the next Mars 'Sample Fetch Rover' as part of a joint NASA and ESA campaign to collect samples from Mars and return them to Earth.

Airbus in Stevenage is leading the Sample Fetch Rover project and has already completed two preliminary studies, to develop sophisticated algorithms to help the rover spot the samples and a robotic arm to pick them up.

The plan is for the rover to launch in 2026 and land on Mars in 2028. Once there, it will collect up to 36 soil, rock and atmospheric samples left behind by NASA's 2020 Perseverance rover, before transferring them to a Mars Ascent Vehicle to begin their journey back to Earth for study.

Graham Turnock, Chief Executive of the UK Space Agency, said:

This is an exciting opportunity for the UK space sector to play a leading role in humanity's efforts to return the first samples from Mars. Airbus has a rich heritage of designing challenging space missions in the UK, from the Solar Orbiter probe to the 'Rosalind Franklin' Mars rover.

The government has made clear its ambitions for space and we are working hard to develop a new National Space Strategy to bring

long-term strategic and commercial benefits to the UK, while strengthening our international partnerships through ESA and beyond.

In November 2019, the UK committed £180 million to ESA's global exploration programme to ensure UK industry plays a leading role in this mission to bring back the first samples from Mars and supports NASA's ambitions to return humans to the Moon.

[Further details](#)

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