

EVENTS/CAUSES

## Land Rover reaches for the skies with latest Virgin Group collaboration

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*Range Rover Autobiography tows new spaceship VSS Unity at global reveal and naming event*

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

British automaker Land Rover is thinking galactic to put itself on the forefront of technological advancement.

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Over the weekend of Feb. 20-21, a Range Rover Autobiography helped to reveal the Virgin Galactic SpaceShipTwo, officially christened VSS Unity at the naming ceremony. The Land Rover brand frequently positions itself as a leader or ally in the technology field, as the automotive sector is heavily dependent on technology.

"We have partnered with Virgin Galactic because we share the same long-term vision to invest in innovative design and technology to help us go further and achieve more," said Kim Palmer, public relations manager at Land Rover UK. "Not simply to enable mankind to explore, but to develop this partnership to inspire others, from our tens of thousands of employees and customers to schools and colleges and motivating more young people to pursue careers in engineering, science and technology and explore new ways of traveling for future generations."

The final frontier

The event took place in front of media, Virgin Galactic's "Future Astronauts," stakeholders and VIP guests. A Range Rover Autobiography towed out both Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson and the SpaceShipTwo, which was then named VSS Unity by physicist and cosmologist Stephen Hawking in a prerecorded message.

In that message, Mr. Hawking says that he has always dreamed of space flight but never thought it was anything more than a dream and that he is thankful to Sir Richard for bringing it closer to a reality, for himself and for everyone. The reveal ceremony and Mr. Hawking's message were captured in a video, in which Sir Richard explains the rationale for suborbital passenger planes.



*Sir Richard Branson, Range Rover Autobiography, and VSS Unity*

"Land Rover is proud to have been a partner of Virgin Galactic since April 2014 and a fleet of Land Rover SUVs have become an integral part of the team's day to day operating environment in Mojave," Mr. Palmer said. "So it was fitting that the Range Rover Autobiography took a starring role in the events towing out the new Virgin Galactic spaceship as it made its global debut in front of the world's media.

"This is the latest milestone in the partnership between our two brands, who share a strong British heritage and who embody a true spirit of adventure, underpinned by technical innovation," he said.

VSS Unity will join Virgin Galactic's fleet of suborbital spaceplanes, which aim to take consumers into space. Testing will begin later this year, with the first flight to follow.



*VSS Unity and Sir Richard Branson*

The aircraft is currently taking reservations at \$250,000 and lists Mr. Hawking himself as one of its clients.

Accordingly, the two businesses are collaborating on a number of STEM education programs, hoping to inspire tomorrow's engineers, scientists and theoretical physicists.

Although the ceremony was an opportunity to show off the towing capabilities of the Range Rover Autobiography, but the brand's goals and reason for involvement are further reaching.



*Range Rover Autobiography tows VSS Unity*

Being involved in a ceremony related to space travel connects Land Rover to innovation and ambition of the highest level. Such an image that will likely have long-term benefits as once-futuristic concepts such as self-driving vehicles come closer to reality.

Tech fiends

Jaguar, Land Rover's sister brand, has also sought to place itself on the cutting-edge of tech advancement.

British automaker Jaguar is partnering with Wired magazine to reach a new market segment with its latest innovations.

The luxury carmaker will unveil the XF C-X75 supercar, featured in the upcoming James Bond film "Spectre," while the Land Rover brand will unveil its new "Mind Sense," "Air Bubble," "Predictive Infotainment" and "Cargo Sense" technologies. By coupling a hyped vehicle that has wide interest among consumers with technological advances, Jaguar will be able to reach a larger audience when it details its innovations ([see story](#)).

Additionally, using the ceremony as a launchpad for a wider range of STEM education programs aligns with Jaguar Land Rover's ongoing commitment to the cause.

Last September, the automaker announced that it will take apprenticeships to the next level by launching a lifelong learning academy for its workforce.

The program is the first of its kind and is being operated in conjunction with the University of Warwick's Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) and the participation of other leading universities. The academy will help Land Rover bridge its business and training needs and ensure its employees possess a constantly-growing skillset that will help the company succeed, while employees will receive an education and develop new skills to advance their careers, emphasizing the brand's commitment to craftsmanship and to its workforce ([see story](#)).

Land Rover's partnership with Virgin Galactic is similarly broad, moving beyond the spaceship to day-to-day operations to helping to train the next generation.

"The partnership has many layers," Mr. Palmer said. "Obviously there is branding on SpaceShipTwo.

"In addition Land Rover vehicles have become part of daily life of the Virgin Galactic team on the Mojave base and, for all Future Astronauts, ' their space experience will begin with Land Rover as they arrive in New Mexico for training, and continue to the moment they drive from the space terminal building to the waiting spaceship," he said. "Around 55 vehicles will form the Land Rover Virgin Galactic Fleet.

"Alongside this day to day support we have been working closely to identify and develop partnership opportunities for CSR and STEM initiatives."

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