
Alcoa aluminium soars with Ares rocket

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Alcoa aluminium plays a critical role in the future of NASA's Ares rocket, named by Time magazine as the 2009 Invention of the Year.

The rocket, which Time called, "The best and smartest and coolest thing built in 2009 a machine that can launch human beings to cosmic destinations we'd never considered before depends on Alcoa's aluminium lithium alloys for the lightweight, strong plates used in the structure.

Breakthrough aluminium lithium alloy technology continues to be developed at the Alcoa Technical Center in Pittsburgh to support projects such as the Ares program, along with first of kind manufacturing practices to meet the challenge of turning aluminium lithium ingots into high performance plate products.

Aluminium lithium ingots are cast at Alcoa Technical Center before being shipped to Alcoa's Davenport Works in Iowa, where they are rolled into plate. Alcoa's Davenport Works is the only supplier certified by NASA to provide the light gauge, high quality plate for the Ares 1 crew launch vehicle.

NASA awarded Alcoa contracts now totalling USD 18.7 million since 2007 to develop manufacturing capabilities and to supply the initial requirements for aluminium lithium alloy products. A year later, NASA certified Alcoa as the sole supplier of the high performance aluminium lithium alloy thin plate. In supplying plate products to NASA since 2008, Alcoa's Technical Center and Davenport Works facilities have demonstrated both the capability and flexibility needed for NASA to meet its program goals.

Alcoa aluminium has been used in the space program since its inception. Alcoa and NASA are also collaborating on Ares V, the heavy cargo launch vehicle currently under development.

Mr Harry Kiskaddon commercial director of Alcoa Aerospace said that "We congratulate NASA on this significant recognition of the cutting edge technologies used on its Ares rockets program. And we're honoured to play such a critical role in the agency's next generation of space vehicle."

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