The seven astronauts who will fly space shuttle Discovery on the STS-131 mission to the International Space Station recently completed a full launch dress rehearsal. Flying in their T-38 jets, the astronauts arrived at Kennedy's Shuttle Landing Facility to begin four days of training. It's known as the Terminal Countdown Demonstration Test, or TCDT -- a fundamental milestone for every space shuttle mission. STS-131 Commander Alan Poindexter and Pilot Jim Dutton were joined by Mission Specialists Rick Mastracchio, Stephanie Wilson, Dottie Metcalf-Lindenburger, Clay Anderson and Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency astronaut Naoko Yamazaki. The crew spoke to the media expressing their excitement to be back at Kennedy. Alan Poindexter/STS-131 Commander: We're really looking forward to our dress rehearsal for launch, our TCDT. We've been training real hard and we're just real proud of the folks down here at all the hard work they did getting OV-103 ready for flight. The training included instruction and driving practice in M-113 armored personnel carriers,
which can swiftly take them away from the launch pad in the unlikely event of an emergency.

There also was emergency escape training at the 195-foot level of Launch Pad 39A. The astronauts jumped into a series of baskets suspended from slidewires that could safely whisk them to a nearby bunker on the ground, if necessary.

Poindexter and Dutton practiced landings in the Shuttle Training Aircraft -- a specially designed jet that handles much like a space shuttle.

The highlight of TCDT took place on the final day. Crew members put on their custom-fitted orange flight suits -- the same ones they will wear on launch day -- and climbed aboard NASA's silver Astrovan for the short ride to the pad.

Waiting in the pad's White Room was the Closeout Crew. They checked the astronauts' flight gear and helped them into their assigned seats aboard Discovery.

Once seated inside the shuttle, crew members checked out all the dials, switches and buttons they'll use during flight.

NASA's launch director in the Launch Control Center then led the ground crew and launch team through a realistic launch countdown simulation.

With their training and launch rehearsal successfully completed, the STS-131 astronauts returned to
Houston to continue training for their mission to the International Space Station in April.