

Beginnings



NASA photo

Bumper-WAC Corporal was America's first large two-stage rocket. It was a German V-2 topped with a US Army Corporal missile. Eight such Bumper-WACs were assembled. The first launch took place on May 13, 1948, at White Sands Proving Ground, N.M. The hybrid system attained only slightly more speed and altitude than a V-2, but on Feb. 24, 1949, a Bumper-WAC set records for a man-made object,

reaching 5,150 mph and an altitude of 244 miles. Bumper-WAC operations moved the following year to the fledgling test grounds at Cape Canaveral, Fla. The project ended in July 1950, having taught scientists much about rocket motor ignition at high altitudes, separation of stages, and increases in rocket speed in stages.