

Ball Aerospace Congratulates the New Horizons Mission Team Ball's Ralph Camera Snaps Closest Pics of Pluto and Cruises into Kuiper Belt

PR Newswire
BOULDER, Colo.

BOULDER, Colo., July 14, 2015 [/PRNewswire/](#) -- Ball Aerospace & Technologies Corp. salutes NASA, the John Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory and the Southwest Research Institute (SwRI) for bringing us never-before-seen images of the dwarf planet Pluto from the New Horizons mission. Ball's Ralph instrument is the "eyes" of the new Horizons mission and has travelled for nearly a decade through the extreme cold and radiation of space to map Pluto and its moons.

"The important accomplishment of New Horizons speaks to the ingenuity NASA has employed again and again to push the frontiers of space and human knowledge," said Jim Oschmann, vice president and general manager for Ball's Civil Space and Technology business unit. "This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to study Pluto and waiting a decade to get there was well worth it."

After traveling nearly ten years and three billion miles, New Horizons passed by Pluto on July 14, 2015 coming within 7,000 miles of Pluto's icy surface before shooting into the unexplored region known as the Kuiper Belt.

Ball's 23-pound Ralph instrument aboard New Horizons hosts a suite of image detectors boasting resolution 10 times better than the human eye while using only seven watts of power – about the same as a night-light. Ralph is one of three cameras aboard the spacecraft, charged with making the maps that detail Pluto, its moons, and other Kuiper Belt objects. Ralph was designed to study the surface geology of Pluto, its atmosphere and temperature providing insight to scientists on what the planet's atmosphere is made of, what its surface looks like, what types of geological structures reside there, and how the solar wind interacts with its atmosphere. Ralph is so named because it's coupled with an ultraviolet spectrometer called Alice, a nod to the characters in the classic 50s TV sitcom, "The Honeymooners."

New Horizons has entered the Kuiper Belt, which spans more than a billion miles past Neptune's orbit. The region is believed to harbor some 70,000 objects more than 60 miles in diameter and billions of comets, each containing materials created during our solar system's formation 4.5 billion years ago. The full data set from the New Horizons flyby will take more than a year to trickle back to Earth due to the probe's extreme distance and limited power.

The New Horizons spacecraft was built for NASA by SwRI and the Applied Physics Laboratory at Johns Hopkins. The mission's principal investigator is SwRI's Alan Stern.

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