



Luca Parmitano turns 50: from the Italian Air Force to missions aboard the International Space Station

Selected by ESA in 2009, the colonel took part in two orbital missions and was the first Italian to command the ISS.

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Luca Parmitano turns 50 on 27 September. An astronaut with the European Space Agency and a colonel in the Aeronautica Militare, he has completed two missions aboard the International Space Station.

In **2013**, he became the first Italian to conduct an extravehicular activity. Six years later, he became the first Italian to command the International Space Station and the third ESA astronaut to hold the post.

His career combines operational service, experimental flight and orbital missions. It also includes two emergencies he faced during an AMX flight and outside the Station.

From the Accademia Aeronautica to the AMX

Born in Paternò, Sicily, on **27 settembre 1976**, Parmitano graduated in 1995 from the Galileo Galilei science high school in Catania. During his studies, he spent a year in California on an Intercultura scholarship.

Later in 1995, he joined the **Aeronautica Militare**, attending the Sparviero IV course at the Accademia Aeronautica in Pozzuoli. In 1999, he earned a degree in Political Science from the University of Naples.

Two years later, he completed basic training with the U.S. Air Force at **Sheppard Air Force Base** in Texas. From 2001 to 2007, he served on AMX aircraft with the 13^o Gruppo in Amendola.

On that aircraft, he earned qualifications including Combat Ready, Four Ship Leader and Mission Commander/Package Leader. In **luglio 2009**, he received a master's degree in Experimental Flight Engineering in Toulouse.

Over the course of his career, he has logged more than **2,000 flight hours**. He qualified on more than 20 types of military aircraft and helicopters and has flown over 40 types of aircraft.

European selection and orbit

In **2009**, Parmitano was selected as an ESA astronaut. After being assigned to the backup crew for Expedition 34, he became a flight engineer for Expeditions 36 and 37.

His first trip to space began on **28 maggio 2013**. He launched from the Baikonur Cosmodrome aboard Soyuz TMA-09M, bound for the International Space Station, where he remained until November.

During the mission, he conducted two extravehicular activities. The first, on **9 luglio**, lasted six hours and seven minutes and made him the first Italian to conduct an activity outside the Station.

The second spacewalk, on **16 luglio 2013**, was cut short after water began accumulating inside his spacesuit helmet. The malfunction impaired his vision and breathing, but Parmitano managed to return to the Station.

Command of the Space Station

Parmitano returned to orbit in **2019**. During his second mission, he assumed command of the ISS, becoming the first Italian and the third astronaut from the European Space Agency to perform this role.

On **25 gennaio 2020**, during an operation to repair the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer, he reached a cumulative total of 31 hours and 54 minutes outside the Station. He thus surpassed Christer Fuglesang's previous European record.

The source also identifies Parmitano as the crew pilot for **Artemis III** and places the mission in 2027. The flight would represent his third mission to space.

Parmitano sees professional preparation as central to risk management. Speaking about the incidents he has faced, he summed up this principle by saying that “the antidote to fear is knowledge.”

The 2005 English Channel incident

An earlier emergency occurred in **2005**, during a course in Belgium. The AMX flown by the then-captain struck a stork while flying over the English Channel, causing severe damage to the instrumentation.

Despite the conditions in the cockpit, Parmitano managed to land. For that incident, the President of the Republic awarded him the Silver Medal for Aeronautical Valor in **2007**.

His other honors include the NASA Distinguished Public Service Medal, the **NASA Space Flight Medal**, and the title of Knight Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.

He has also received two honorary degrees: one in Economics and Management from **LUISS**, and the other in Maritime and Air Transport Science and Logistics from the University of Messina.

Science outreach beyond missions

Alongside his operational activities, Parmitano takes part in festivals and television programs and has published several books. These include *Volare. 166 giorni con @astro_luca*, *Volare. Lo*

spazio e altre sfide, and Camminare tra le stelle.

The latter volume is aimed primarily at younger readers and recounts his experiences with the goal of bringing teenagers closer to science. In **2017**, asteroid 37627 Lucaparmitano was named after him.

His family life remains separate from his public image. Parmitano has said that when he works in Houston, his main goal is to get home to prepare dinner for his daughters: “To them, I am not an astronaut—I am a dad.”

His 50th birthday thus comes after a career built around **military aviation**, testing, and space activities. Throughout this journey, technical training and public outreach have played parallel roles.

News link: <https://tg24.sky.it/scienze/approfondimenti/luca-parmitano-astronauta-storia>