

Tesla unveils groundbreaking electric car

March 26 2009, by Rob Woollard



Tesla Motors Chairman and CEO Elon Musk introduces the new Tesla Model S all-electric sedan in Hawthorne, California. Musk said the state-of-the-art, five-seat sedan will be the world's first mass-produced, highway-capable electric car.

US automaker Tesla Motors unveiled Thursday its state-of-the-art five-seat sedan, billed as the world's first mass-produced, highway-capable electric car.

Tesla chief executive Elon Musk said the company, which last year released its breakthrough two-seat Roadster, aims to have its sleek Model S sedan roll off assembly lines by 2011.

The futuristic zero-emission vehicle will be powered by lithium-ion battery packs capable of traveling between 160 and 300 miles (257 and 482 kilometers) per charge.

The car has an anticipated base price of 57,400 dollars but will cost less than 50,000 after a federal tax credit of 7,500 dollars, Musk said.

While the price tag is steep compared to other mass-market sedans, Tesla has stressed that tax incentives, relatively inexpensive maintenance and the lack of fueling costs will make the car competitive with cheaper rival sedans.

Musk told reporters he hoped the car would lead a new generation of vehicles that would help the [auto industry](#) wean itself off foreign oil.

"What we really wanted to show the [car industry](#) is that it is possible to create a compelling electric car at a compelling price ... We hope the industry will follow our lead," Musk said.

"It's incredibly important that we wean ourselves off oil as soon as possible and that we make the transition to electric vehicles rapidly."

Musk said Tesla aimed to manufacture around 20,000 units per year from an undisclosed factory location in Southern California and said the vehicle could be charged at home in just four hours.

"Even at 20,000 cars per year, we won't come close to affecting the [electricity grid](#) and you will be able to charge this car at home," he added.

"It's capable of taking a wide range of currents and voltages, and the charge is built into the car so you don't have to worry about 'Is there a charger at the destination that I'm driving to?'"

Tesla said its new model would become the "car of choice for environmentally conscious and discriminating drivers throughout North America and Europe." It expects to roughly split initial sales between the

two continents before expanding into Asia in 2012.

Tesla's other zero-emission car, the two-seat Roadster, is on sale in Europe and the United States.

The company said last year it had ramped up production of the high-performance vehicle, which has a price tag of about 100,000 dollars, due to soaring demand.

Founded in 2003, Tesla specializes in the environmentally-friendly, [electric cars](#) that several car manufacturers are starting to produce.

Troubled automotive giant General Motors is developing its own electric sedan, the Chevrolet Volt, which it expects to go on sale in 2011 for about 40,000 dollars a unit.

Thursday's unveiling came against the backdrop of a teetering US auto industry while President Barack Obama has said his administration wants to see a million electric cars on the roads by 2015.

Auto industry analysts were cautious about whether Tesla's Model S suggested that electric vehicles were the future of the US auto industry, saying hybrid vehicles and low fuel prices could stymie their growth.

Jim Hossack of California-based AutoPacific Consulting said Tesla's latest prototype was "something of a technical marvel" but questioned whether it could revolutionize the US auto industry.

"The problem is our fuel price. If you're going to launch an electric vehicle you probably want to do it in a market where fuel prices are high," Hossack told AFP.

"At the moment in the US, they're cheap, a quarter of what they are in

Europe or Japan. Hybrids might be better positioned to be the dominant technology."

While Model S production would demonstrate that an electric car can be mass produced, Hossack noted that "we can also put a man on the moon. And it turns out it's expensive."

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Citation: Tesla unveils groundbreaking electric car (2009, March 26) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-03-tesla-unveils-groundbreaking-electric-car.html>

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