

Tesla's first SUV, the Model X, is finally hitting the road (Update)

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A Tesla executive talks about the features of the Model X car at the company's headquarters Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2015, in Fremont, Calif. CEO Elon Musk said the Model X sets a new bar for automotive engineering, with unique features like rear falcon-wing doors, which open upward, and a driver's door that opens on approach and closes itself when the driver is inside. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

Electric vehicle maker Tesla Motors has mastered the sporty two-seater

and the elegant sedan. Now, it wants to conquer the family hauler.

Tesla's Model X—one of the only all-electric SUVs on the market—was officially unveiled Tuesday night near the company's California factory. SUVs were delivered to the first six buyers.

CEO Elon Musk says the Model X sets a new bar for automotive engineering, with unique features like rear falcon-wing doors, which open upward, and a driver's door that opens on approach and closes itself when the driver is inside.

"All these things together make the car amazing," he said.

The Model X is the third vehicle from 12-year-old Tesla, after the Roadster—which was discontinued in 2012—and the Model S sedan. It should attract new customers—particularly women—to the brand, and it goes on sale as the market for luxury SUVs is booming. U.S. luxury SUV sales were up 17 percent through August, five times better than the industry as a whole.

"If Tesla's going to be a more significant player, they need more products, and SUVs are what the market is demanding," said Michelle Krebs, a senior analyst with the car buying site AutoTrader.com. Musk said Tesla expects about half of its sales to be SUVs.



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But there are drawbacks. Only a fraction of the sippy-cup set will be able to afford the Model X, even with a \$7,500 federal tax credit. A fully loaded performance model is \$142,000; exact pricing of the base model hasn't been released, but Musk said the Model X will cost \$5,000 more than an equivalent Model S, or around \$93,000. Musk said the company will eventually offer a less expensive variant with a smaller battery.

The Model X shares a platform and motor with the Model S, which is made at the same factory. But unlike the S, which has several battery options, the X only has a 90 kilowatt-hour battery and only comes with

all-wheel drive. The 90D version will go 257 miles on a full charge, while the P90D performance version will go 250 miles. Tesla's high-speed "ludicrous mode" is offered on the P90D; it goes from 0 to 60 mph in 3.2 seconds.

The Model X has three rows and seats seven; on a test ride, the back row could fit an adult and had a surprising amount of headroom. The front windshield, which Tesla says is the biggest in the industry, sweeps back and over the front seats. Navigation, music and cabin controls are accessed through a 17-inch dashboard touch screen.

But the most eye-popping feature is the double-hinged falcon-wing doors. They need less than a foot of clearance to open, and they're fitted with sensors so they won't trap hands or hit cars parked next to them.

The doors—and the Tesla-designed second-row seats, which all move independently—were among the reasons the Model X's launch was delayed several times. Musk announced plans for the Model X in 2012; it was initially expected to go on sale in early 2014.

Musk says the company "got a little carried away" and might have designed the Model X differently if it had known the final engineering costs and manufacturing complexity.



The Tesla Model X car is introduced at the company's headquarters Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2015, in Fremont, Calif. Tesla's Model X—one of the only all-electric SUVs on the market—was officially unveiled Tuesday night near the company's California factory. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

"I'm not sure anyone should make this car," he said. "There's far more there than is really necessary to sell the car."

That complexity means there will be a slow production ramp-up this fall. Around 25,000 people have already placed orders for the X, Musk said. Customers who put in an order now will have to wait up to a year to get one.

Last month, Musk lowered Tesla's annual sales forecast from 55,000 vehicles to between 50,000 and 55,000. But Musk says Tesla is still on track to sell 500,000 vehicles by 2020. It expects to reach that goal with

the introduction of its next car, the lower-priced Model 3, which is due out in 2017.



The Tesla Model X , with its upward swinging rear doors is parked between two cars, at the company's headquarters Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2015, in Fremont, Calif. CEO Elon Musk says the Model X sets a new bar for automotive engineering, with unique features like rear falcon-wing doors, which open upward, and a driver's door that opens on approach and closes itself when the driver is inside. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

The Model X is alone, for now, in the all-electric luxury SUV market. Its closest competitor is the plug-in hybrid Porsche Cayenne SUV, which starts at \$77,200. But others, spurred by Tesla, are planning their own all-electric models. Audi said this month that it will have an all-electric SUV by 2018.

At the lower end of the market, there's the \$32,000 Kia Soul EV, an

electric crossover, but it only has a 93-mile range. Toyota briefly sold an electric version of the RAV4 SUV, but that was discontinued last year.



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In this Jan. 15, 2013 file photo, Franz von Holzhausen, Chief Designer, Tesla Motors, talks about the doors on the Tesla Model X at media previews for the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. Tesla will officially unveil the Model X, the electric vehicle maker's first SUV, Tuesday night, Sept. 29, 2015, at its California factory. (AP Photo/Paul Sancya, File)



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The dashboard of the Tesla Model X car is shown at the company's headquarters Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2015, in Fremont, Calif. CEO Elon Musk said the Model X sets a new bar for automotive engineering, with unique features like rear falcon-wing doors, which open upward, and a driver's door that opens on approach and closes itself when the driver is inside. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)



The Tesla Model X car is test driven at the company's headquarters Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2015, in Fremont, Calif. CEO Elon Musk says the Model X sets a new bar for automotive engineering, with unique features like rear falcon-wing doors, which open upward, and a driver's door that opens on approach and closes itself when the driver is inside. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)



A Tesla executive displays the new Model X car at the company's headquarters Tuesday, Sept. 29, 2015, in Fremont, Calif. CEO Elon Musk says the Model X sets a new bar for automotive engineering, with unique features like rear falcon-wing doors, which open upward, and a driver's door that opens on approach and closes itself when the driver is inside. (AP Photo/Marcio Jose Sanchez)

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