

Tesla software update allows self-parking, limits speed

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Tesla Model S

Some Tesla Motors vehicles can park themselves without a driver inside with a software update beamed to customers over the weekend.

The update also puts new speed limits on Tesla's semi-autonomous Autopilot mode and makes several enhancements, including automatically slowing when the car is approaching a curve and keeping the car in its lane even when the lane markings are faded.

CEO Elon Musk said the parking feature is a "baby step" toward his eventual goal: Letting drivers summon their self-driving, self-charging cars from anywhere using their phones.

"I actually think, and I might be slightly optimistic on this, within two years you'll be able to summon your car from across the country," Musk said on a conference call with reporters. "This is the first little step in that direction."

For now, though, the system isn't truly autonomous.

"It's more like remote-control parking," Musk said.

Owners must line up their Model S sedan or Model X SUV within 33 feet of the space they want it to drive or back into. They must then stand within 10 feet and direct the car to park itself using the key fob or Tesla's smartphone app. The car can also exit the spot when the driver summons it. If it's going into a home garage, it can also open and close the garage door.

Tesla says the system is helpful for tight parking spots, but cautions that it should only be used on private property since it can't detect every potential obstacle. The car could hit bikes hanging from a garage ceiling, for example.

The software update also puts new speed limits on Tesla's semi-autonomous mode. The car will now only drive at or slightly above the speed limit when the Autopilot mode is being used on residential roads and on roads without a center divider. If the car enters such an area in Autopilot mode, it will automatically slow down.

Musk said he's not aware of any accidents caused when a Tesla was driving in Autopilot mode, but he thinks the change won't be a problem

for owners.

"On roads without a center divider, where there's potential for a more serious collision, it makes sense not to go more than five miles per hour above the speed limit," he said.

The updates will go into about 60,000 vehicles, including Model S sedans made after September 2014 and the new Model X SUV.

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