

Elon Musk, visionary Tesla and SpaceX founder

February 7 2018, by Glenn Chapman



Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk's SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket sent one of his Tesla cars into orbit

From cars to rockets, Elon Musk dreams big.

On Tuesday, the South African-born entrepreneur combined both of

those passions, [blasting one of his Tesla electric cars into space](#) aboard his own rocket.

It was the latest feat for the 46-year-old Silicon Valley billionaire who has been hailed as a leading innovator and visionary.

Born in Pretoria, on June 28, 1971, the son of an engineer father and a Canadian-born model mother, Musk left South Africa in his late teens to attend Queen's University in Ontario.

He transferred to the University of Pennsylvania after two years and earned bachelor's degrees in physics and business.

After graduating from the prestigious Ivy League school, Musk abandoned plans to pursue further studies at Stanford University.

Instead, he dropped out of school and started Zip2, a company that made online publishing software for the media industry.

He banked his first millions before the age of 30 when he sold Zip2 to US computer maker Compaq for more than \$300 million in 1999.

Musk's next company, X.com, eventually merged with PayPal, the online payments firm bought by internet auction giant eBay for \$1.5 billion in 2002.

After leaving PayPal, Musk embarked on a series of ever more ambitious ventures.

He became the chairman of electric carmaker Tesla in 2004 and it was a Tesla roadster that was sent into orbit on Tuesday from a Cape Canaveral launchpad.

SpaceX's webcast showed Musk's cherry red car soaring into [space](#), as David Bowie's "Space Oddity" played in the background—with the words "DON'T PANIC" visible on the dashboard, in an apparent nod to the sci-fi classic the "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy."

Powering the car on its journey towards an orbit near Mars was a massive Falcon Heavy rocket built by Musk's space exploration company SpaceX, founded in 2002.

SolarCity and Hyperloop

Musk serves as chief executive officer and chief technology officer of SpaceX, which has become a leading supplier of private space launches.

In 2012, SpaceX sent its Dragon cargo ship to the orbiting International Space Station.

After some early crashes and near-misses, SpaceX has also perfected the art of landing booster engines on solid ground and on ocean platforms, rendering them reusable.

SpaceX recently announced that two private citizens have paid money to be sent around the Moon in what would be the farthest humans have ever traveled to deep space since the 1970s.

Besides being the head of SpaceX and Tesla, Musk is the chairman of SolarCity, a solar panel installer recently bought by Tesla.

Musk has also promoted research into an ultra-fast "Hyperloop" rail transport system that would transport people at near supersonic speeds.

Musk's jokingly-named The Boring Company aims to potentially build tunnels for the Hyperloop One super-high-speed transport project.

"He is a visionary who has some key passions which he pursues with vigor," Jackdaw Research chief analyst Jan Dawson said of Musk.

"He doesn't sit around and wait for people to do something about them; he goes out and does it himself."

Some of his ideas have prompted questions and he has raised eyebrows with a theory that the world as it is known may be a computer simulation.

Musk has also said he wants to make humans an "interplanetary species" by establishing a colony of people living on the Mars.

The first tests of a massive rocket that could reach Mars may come as early 2019, with orbital tests in 2020.

Musk lives in Los Angeles and holds US, Canadian and South African citizenship.

Married and divorced three times, he has five children. A sixth child died in infancy.

Forbes estimates Musk's current net worth at \$20.3 billion.

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Citation: Elon Musk, visionary Tesla and SpaceX founder (2018, February 7) retrieved 30 September 2023 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-02-elon-musk-visionary-tesla-spacex.html>

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