Official name: Tesla, Inc (formerly Tesla Motors, Inc.).

Brands: Tesla, SolarCity, Grohmann Automation, Maxwell Technologies, DeepScale, Hibar Systems, SilLion.

Owned by: Institutional investors (41%),Tesla insiders (20.08%), the biggest of which is Elon Musk (17.19%) and retail investors (38.83%).

Current situation: Before 2021, Tesla lost money on every car that it ever sold. Tesla lost money for its first 18 years of operation and then made a slight profit gambling on bitcoins and selling zero-emission vehicle (ZEV) credits to other carmakers.

However, despite making a profit in 2021, many economists doubt Tesla's profitability in the longer term. This is especially true given that there's nothing Tesla is doing that other carmakers can't do better and cheaper. Nowhere is this more true than China, which accounted for a big hunk of Tesla's 2021 profits. The Chinese government wants Chinese companies to dominate the global electric car market. Even as Tesla sales soar in China, Chinese companies are quietly copying Tesla's vehicles. When Chinese companies are capable of producing a suitable rival for Tesla, Tesla will probably find itself squeezed out of the Chinese market, with the help of the Chinese government.

Chances of survival: faint to moderate.

Tesla's share price is completely out of sync with the reality of Tesla's abysmal long term performance. Many experts believe Tesla's long term chances of competing against the likes of Hyundai and Volkswagen are faint. Tesla isn't good at building cars and has consistently struggled to build cars profitably. So, it's likely that its share price will drop dramatically and that the Tesla brand will eventually be bought by another carmaker •

a closer look at TESLA

REGARDLESS OF THE GOOD intentions behind the original launch of Telsa motors, the current company is effectively a Ponzi scheme, a confidence trick that requires new suckers to pay off the ones whose money has already been spent.

Like most sharemarket bubbles, Tesla requires hordes of fans who are high on enthusiasm and low on actual knowledge.

The three big lies that Tesla fans believe are true

1) Fans believe that Tesla is a wildly sucessful company.

2) Fans believe that Tesla is a world leader in technology, especially battery technology.

3) Fans believe that Tesla isn't scared of competion because it's already decades ahead of everyone else. They also believe that Tesla is about become even more successful.

And pigs might fly. Let's look at these three assumptions.

1) Is Tesla is a wildly sucessful company? Yes, in terms of great ideas, no in terms of paying back the billions that have been invested in it.

In fact, before 2021, **Tesla lost money on every car it ever built.** Let us repeat: before 2021, Tesla never made a profit building cars. Ever.

Instead, in the couple of years before 2021, Tesla sold dubious Californian government carbon credits to other car companies and gambled successfully on bitcoins.

That's how pre-2021 Tesla made a slight profit. But it still lost money on every car it ever built.

In late 2021, Tesla's stars lined up, briefly.

Tesla's Model 3 became the bestselling car across Europe in September, the first time a battery electric vehicle had topped Euro monthly sales charts.

Tesla sold 24,591 Model 3s in September of 2021. This amounted to a 2.6% share of the 964,800 vehicles sold in Europe that month.

Then, US rental car company Hertz ordered 100,000 Teslas. Or, rather, Hertz agreed to place an initial order for 100,000 Teslas by the end of 2022.

And, thanks to a new factory and Tesla's ability to keep operating during a global computer chip shortage, Tesla sales took off in China.

But golden summers rarely endure; in the longer term, Tesla may pay a high price for its 2021 'sell-cars-at-all-costs' strategy.

Telsa has already warned that its profits are likely to take a hit as the costs of its new factories begin to bite. But factory costs are only one of Tesla's many deep-seated problems.

Tesla's impressive sales in Europe were partially due to strong, pro-electric-car policies by European governments. But they were also the result of the global computer chip shortage. This shortage meant that conventional carmakers were often unable to supply cars. Tesla could supply cars, so it made the sales. But Tesla is now also facing parts shortages.

As the chip shortage ends, Tesla is going to find itself up against Europe's established car companies like Volkswagen-Audi-Bentley, which will be selling upmarket electric cars at prices that Tesla will find it hard to compete with.

The sale of 100,000 Teslas to Hertz rental was an impressive milestone, but Tesla will probably make little or nothing on the deal. In good times, car companies typically barely break even on sales to rental car companies. All that the car companies gain from sales to rental firms is public profile and turnover.

That is, the more cars a company makes, the cheaper it becomes to build each car. So, an extra 100,000 sales to Hertz will help pay off Tesla's costs of building its factories and filling them with billions in machines.

But, in reality, it's probably just another 100,000 Teslas being sold at little or no profit.

And it's actually worse than that: the Hertz deal happened because other car companies basically weren't interested in selling to rental car companies in the US at the time.

Due to the global chip/car shortage, the major carmakers didn't want to sell vehicles to rental companies at low prices when they could sell direct to consumers at high prices.

So, Tesla clearly wasn't expecting to sell these 100,000 vehicles to consumers at a profit. Or perhaps he was making a shrewd long term investment. Or perhaps Elon Musk was simply desperate to remain the world's richest man, so he spent 2021 making billion dollar deals that were not quite as miraculous as they appeared.

To give credit where credit is due, what makes the Tesla-Hertz deal historically important is that it's the first time a major American rental company has replaced a hunk (about a fifth) of its fleet with electric cars.

Even though Tesla won't make much money on the deal, rental customers who have a postive experience in a Tesla are more likely to buy a Tesla for their next car. Or so the theory goes.

So yes, it's incredible that Hertz intends to spend billions on electric cars from one of the America's most unreliable carmakers. But perhaps, having sold much of its vehicle fleet during the 2020 Covid epidemic, before going broke, Hertz had little choice.

One thing that everyone agrees on: Tesla's Chinese factories are cranking out vast numbers of cars. Exactly how much Tesla is making on this mass production is a matter of speculation.

But Tesla's number one enemy in China is the Chinese government. The Chinese government has a stated policy of actively intervening to help Chinese car companies. And the Chinese government wants a Chinese company to dominate the global electric car market.

For now, China doesn't have a credible local company that can compete with Tesla, so Tesla is welcome, sort of.

But Evergrande, the bankrupt property giant, announced in October of 2021 that it was switching to becoming a giant electric car company, called Hengchi.

Hands up everyone who thinks the Chinese government is going to let Tesla take sales away from Evergrande-Hengchi. Thought not. It will take a while for Hengchi to pump up production (it has yet to sell a single actual car).

But even if Hengchi goes completely bust, some other Chinese electric carmaker will carry on the fight. Or, rather, one or more of China's 400 electric carmakers.

In fact, many cynics believe the only reason Tesla was welcomed into China was so that Chinese companies (such as the one below) could copy Tesla's technology.

Tesla is also extremely vulnerable to the ongoing trade war between China and the US.

Anytime China wants to fight back against the US, it merely has to hit Tesla with tariffs or restrictions.

The Chinese government always finds an excuse; they'll force Tesla to recall all its vehicles multiple times for apparent safety failures, or they'll plant stories in the state-run media warning about the safety and reliability of Tesla cars. The end result will be bad news for Tesla.

Where does this all leave Tesla? In the short term, Tesla is one of the most valuable car companies in the world. In the longer term, Tesla is likely to end up losing money once more.

Global pressure to phase out fossil-powered cars has forced carmakers like Toyota and Volkswagen to suddenly invest hundreds of billions in electric car technology.

But the global electric car market is still comparitively tiny, so there will shortly be a head-on collision between demand and supply. In order to get their money back, global carmakers need to sell hundreds of millions of electric cars. But there isn't currently a global market for hundreds of millions of electric cars.

For example, Tesla sold 24,591 Model 3s in September of 2021. This amounted to a tiny, 2.6% share of the 964,800 vehicles sold in Europe that month. The vast majority of these new cars were powered by fossils. The electric car market can double or triple or quadruple, but it will still take many years before it becomes anything like the dominant force in the global car market.

Before they can get their multi-billions back, carmakers like Volkswagen, Hyundai and Toyota are going to be selling electric cars at a loss. And they can afford to. Tesla can't.

Eventually, Tesla's starry-eyed investors are going to realise that Tesla is not the miracle company they believed it to be. It's a company whose main product is dreams of a rosy future that never quite appears. That's when Tesla is going to be in very deep trouble.

Let us remind you once more just how unsuccessful Tesla has been; Tesla lost money for its first 18 years of operation and then made a slight profit gambling on Bitcoin and selling zero-emission vehicle (*ZEV*) credits to other carmakers. That's it, 2021 was the only year that Tesla actually began making money selling cars, before the Evergrande crash, before the costs of Tesla's factories began to bite, before rival carmakers began a brutal price war.

For years, American tech companies like Uber and Tesla have enjoyed an absurdly high share price that has little or nothing to do with actually making real money.

For example, for 2021, Tesla announced profits of US$5.5 billion. Impressive, right? Not so, according to people who've done the maths on Tesla's claims. For example, the respected *Forbes* magazine, stated: "Musk knows those profits are illusory and unsustainable..."

According to Forbes, Tesla's sales would need to be at least 16 times larger in order to justify Tesla's early 2022 stock price.

"Selling just under 1 million cars in 2021 sounds great and was no small feat. However, that number is minuscule compared to the number of vehicles Tesla must sell to justify its stock price – anywhere from 16 million to upwards of 46 million depending [on how you measure it]."

And it's worth mentioning that Tesla's profits were partially due to the fact that Tesla paid no tax on its record sales. Really.

Can Tesla continue its record climb to the top? Almost certainly not. History shows us how this kind of economic boom usually ends: a crash, like the dot.com bubble of 2000.

As one commentator put it:

"The late-1990s dotcom bubble was built on speculative euphoria and unbridled exuberance for untapped, limitless financial gains. The only problem was, the Internet wasn't an easy, magical medium for making money. That didn't prevent venture capitalists from throwing money at any old dotcom company in order to build market share, or from buying up shares in dotcoms that had little chance of becoming profitable. Indiscriminate investing and the fear of missing out... led to one of the greatest crashes in the history of Wall Street."

2) **Tesla is not a world leader in battery technology, and does not produce batteries.**

In fact, Tesla has never produced a single commercially-viable battery. Not one, ever. Most so-called Tesla batteries are simply rebranded Panasonic batteries. Tesla and Panasonic already own a joint battery factory in Nevada, USA.

The confusion over Tesla batteries arose because Tesla cars have an ingenious, innovative, battery management system that carefully nurtures the hundreds of batteries that powered the car. But Tesla never built these batteries, sorry; just the system that cooled and controlled the batteries.

Panasonic is no longer Tesla's exclusive battery supplier, but that doesn't mean Tesla is making its own batteries. Instead, Tesla recently also partnered with South Korea's *LG* and China's *CATL*.

Tesla has certainly announced it intends to design and build its own batteries. But currently, this claim appears to be simply more hype from Elon Musk, one of many meaningless promises Musk has made over the years.

3) Tesla will struggle to survive in a competitive market. Fans believe Tesla isn't scared of competion, because Tesla cars are decades ahead of their competitors. In fact, there's nothing Tesla is doing that other carmakers can't do better.

Tesla cars are often poorly built and full of bugs. Nor are Tesla cars capable of fully autonomous driving. It turns out that Elon, like his hoards of eager young followers, were hopelessly optimistic about self-driving cars. And Tesla was forced to admit this to US authorities.

None of this bothers Elon Musk's loyal followers.

They believe that Elon Musk will pull off some slick high tech miracle that makes everything okay. And these same fans happily ignore the unpleasant fact that many Tesla vehicles are announced, then never appear.

For example, Tesla has announced both a pickup truck and a huge highway semi-truck.

Tesla claimed to have hundreds of thousands of advance orders. However, at the time of writing, there was no clear sign of commercial production of either vehicle. Just more promises.

In case you haven't noticed, Tesla announcements tend to be long on grand promises and short on facts. For example, Tesla has never disclosed any of the vital details on exactly how these trucks would work.

Many experts who know a great deal more about basic science than Elon Musk, doubt if either of these trucks will ever work. Yes, Tesla or anyone else with lots of money can build a truck. But building a truck that works in the real world and makes a profit is quite another matter.

But the Tesla brand is strong. So the brand will remain, probably long after the company that invented it has disappeared into history.

A brief history of Elon Musk

WINSTON CHURCHILL once stated that all great men have unhappy childhoods. Take Elon Musk for example. Born in Pretoria, South Africa, in 1971, Musk's dad reportedly owned one of the largest houses in town. Elon later described his father as a "brilliant engineer but a terrible human being".

Elon's father Errol Musk

Elon's father was reportedly physically, financially and emotionally manipulative and abusive.

Elon's father shot and killed three burglars who broke into his home. He was charged with manslaughter but found not guilty.

Elon Musk's dad also later fathered a child with Elon's 30-year-old stepsister, Jana Bezuidenhout, who was 40 years his junior.

The young Elon Musk suffered under South Africa's toxic male culture. He was awkward and sensitive; an easy target for the brutal bullying that was considered normal at many boys' schools. Elon was once attacked, beaten unconscious and pushed down a flight of stairs by a group of boys. He was reportedly barely recognisable and spent two weeks in hospital recovering from his injuries.


Maye Musk

Like many sensitive children raised in brutal situations, Elon retreated into his immagination. He once said he was "raised by books"such as the sci-fi novels of Isaac Asimov.

He also mastered computer programming at the age of twelve.

When he was 17, Elon briefly attended the University of Pretoria in order to avoid compulsory military service. After five months, Elon left for Canada with his mum. Three years later he moved to the US to study physics and economics. He dropped out and ended up in Silicon Valley.

Elon Musk was a gifted programmer in the right place at the right time. He co-founded *Zip2*, a web software company, which sold in 1999 for US$307 million.

Musk then founded *X.com*, an online bank.

In 2000 X.com merged with PayPal owner *Confinity*. In 2002 Confinity was sold to eBay for $1.5 billion.

People who have endured unhappy childhoods are frequently uncomfortable with silence. Silence allows the trauma within to show its painful face. Thus, people like Elon Musk constantly seek distraction in the form of adventure, conquest, fame and fortune.

That's why, after becoming a multi-millionaire, Elon Musk didn't simply buy a tropical island and retire to a life of meditation and stillness.

And thus we see the gradual transition of Musk from being Elon the visionary, to Elon the messiah to Elon the nutcase.

The worst thing about being successful is that you become surrounded by people who are addicted to your success. They encourage you to take greater and greater risks. They adore you when you're successful and blindly forgive your mistakes. And your adoring fans frequently lead you to your doom. But it sometimes takes a while.

SpaceX

Elon's next megaproject was *SpaceX*. Established with US$100million from the Paypal sale, SpaceX's original goal was to reduce the cost of human space-flight by a factor of ten.

As usual, Elon soon discovered that it wasn't quite that simple.

SpaceX's 2006 first launch attempt ended badly: the Falcon 1 rocket suffered an engine failure about 30 seconds after liftoff. The rocket spun off into the ocean and its satellite crashed into a storage shed.

SpaceX's second attempt, a year later, ended with the Falcon 1 rocket again spinning out of control just before reaching orbit.

SpaceX's third attempt in August 2008, saw the next Falcon 1 rocket explode in flames after the first and second stages of the rocket collided.

Elon was now desperate. And bankrupt. Right-wing billionaire Peter Thiel stepped in to save the company. SpaceX's fourth attempt was the lucky one. The Falcon 1 became the first privately funded, liquid-fueled rocket to successfully make it into orbit.

But before you cheer for Musk's entrepreneurial spirit and engineering skill, it pays to remember that much of the technical expertise for SpaceX's successful launch came from NASA. And, In 2006, long before SpaceX had ever actually launched a rocket, NASA mysteriously chose to award SpaceX a contract ultimately worth US$396 million.

The successful 2008 launch (and another hefty contract with Nasa) helped SpaceX became a major force in private space travel.

Since then SpaceX has gone from strength to strength, being the first private company to launch a human into space and launching a number of successful, innovative rockets. But Musk's company rose to greatness with the help of vast amounts of government know-how and even vaster amounts of government money. And SpaceX's path to greatness has been littered with failures, usually paid for by the American taxpayer.

SpaceX Number 8's Rapid Unscheduled Disassembly over the Gulf of Mexico

It's not that Elon Musk is better or worse at building spacecraft than anyone else; the problem with manned space flight is that, regardless of who's doing it, it's really, really, really expensive, plagued with life-threatening problems and takes decades to achieve even modest success. And Elon Musk rarely displays much in the way of patience.

And, Elon Musk always comes across as a little weird.

In 2012 Elon announced that he wanted to establish a Mars colony by 2040, with a population of 80,000 humans.

In June of 2016, Musk stated that the first unmanned flight of the larger Interplanetary Spaceship was aimed for departure to the red planet in 2022, to be followed by the first manned ITS Mars flight departing in 2024.

But, Elon added, he first needed to blast Mars with a barrage of nuclear bombs in order to warm the planet.

According to his biographer, Ashlee Vance, Musk once said:

"If there was a way that I could not eat, so I could work more, I would not eat. I wish there was a way to get nutrients without sitting down for a meal."

Musk has similar problems with girlfriends:

"I need to find a girlfriend...how much time does a woman want a week? Maybe ten hours? That's kind of the minimum? I don't know."

Oh, and Musk apparently believes that human beings are probably just part of some cosmic video game. "There's a billion-to-one chance we're living in base reality," he said in 2016.

And, Musk once tweeted that the pyramids in Egypt were built by aliens.

Who killed the electric car?

GM's clumsy GM1 electric car

Tesla, with billions of dollars and twenty-first century technology, took 18 years before it made any money building electric cars.

Yet many Americans believe that, in 1996, General Motors had a working, functional, economically-viable electric car, something that Tesla had trouble achieving 25 years later.

These silly assumptions were the basis for the 2006 movie: '*Who killed the electric car?*'

The assumption of the movie was that General Motors had a brilliant electric car but secretly supressed it in order to please the fossil fuels industry.

The reality was a bit less impressive: since the 1970s oil crisis, all of the major carmakets had experimented with electric vehicles. But there were major, almost unsolveable technological hurdles at the time. Besides, once oil became cheap again, the major carmakers largely lost interest.

Then the Californian government proposed harsh new emissions standards, which included a requirement that each carmaker put out a certain number of emissions-free vehicles.

Given that California's electricity was mostly produced by burning fossil fuels, this was a fake green scheme at best. All the Californian regulations would do was to move the pollution from the cities to the smoking powerplants in the countryside.

But the government proposal scared the major carmakers, all of whom then started spending some serious money building prototype electric cars.

Mostly, these electric cars were simply existing models with electric motors.

But GM's *EV1* was different. It was built, ground-up to be an electric car. But, sadly, not a very good one.

The EV1 was astronomically expensive to build and had a limited range (on the original version, about 112km / 70 miles on a flat road on a clear, windless sunny day with no heater or air conditioning in use). The EV1 also handled oddly and was prone to unexpected stoppages.

Above all, the EV1 was also uneconomic to produce. That is, if the customers had been paying the actual costs of developing and building the vehicle, it would have cost about the same as a house.

Instead, EV1 customers paid an affordable monthly lease. GM still owned the cars. This is standard practice with vehicles that are still under development.

In the end, under pressure from General Motors and other car companies, most of the proposed new Californian emissions regulations were dropped.

GM eventually stopped production of the EV1, stating that there was little interest in it.

There were actually tens of thousands of buyers interested in the EV1, but mostly these buyers were only interested in the car at the previous, affordable lease prices.

What these buyers didn't understand was that GM was losing hundreds of thousands on each vehicle, with no real prospect for future profitability. If GM had charged anything like the actual cost of producing the EV1, the market would have evaporated.

So, GM said there was no demand for the vehicle – a public relations blunder – then compounded this blunder by recalling the EV1s and crushing most of them.

The crushing of the EV1s became the basis for the conspiracy theory behind the movie.

But, as electric car enthusiast Ivan Jue pointed out recently, it's normal practice in the car industry to crush development cars. Car companies don't want half-finished vehicles breaking down on motorways. That's also bad PR.

> "The EV1 was never meant for sale. It was lease-only from the start. Other automakers did the same thing at that time... and they are still doing it now.
>
> BMW took back all of their *Active E* vehicles, which leasees loved and [then BMW] destroyed them too. They also destroyed all the Mini electric cars that were part of the pilot [BMW electric car] program. Do you want to guess what will happen to the lease-only Honda Fit and Clarity EVs at lease-end? The crusher."

Jue adds that:

> "GM never stopped [building electric cars] after the EV1....A lot of lessons learned on EV1 went to the [first generation GM] Volt [electric car]. [The sad reality for the EV1 was that] the timing just wasn't right for a pure EV at an affordable price."

But, what really killed the EV1 from a commercial point of view was Toyota's mastery of petrol-electric hybrids.

Not only did Toyota's Prius have a vastly superior range to the EV1, but it was reliable, practical and, above all, could be produced economically.

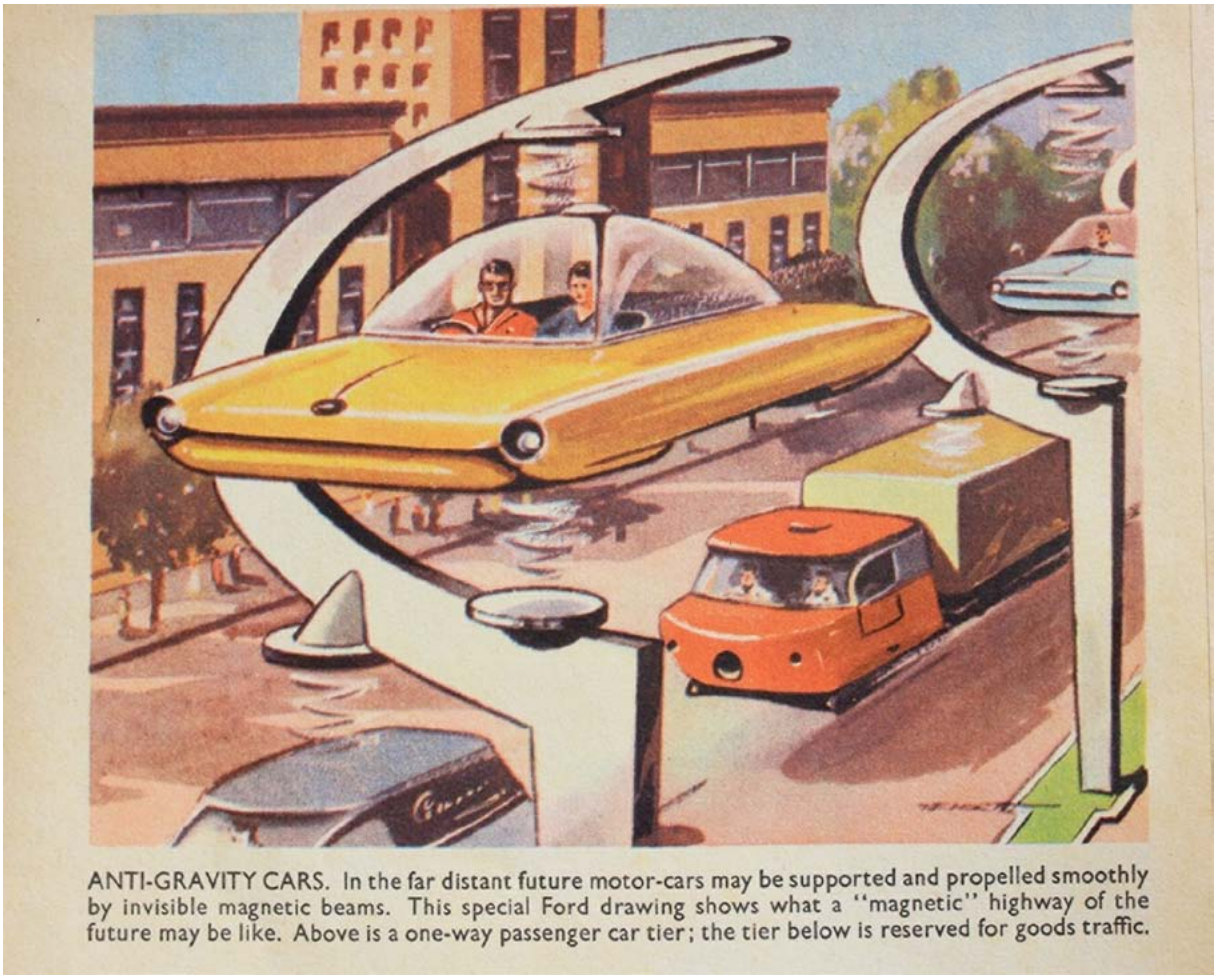
And it met the Californian emissions standards.

But Americans love a good conspiracy theory, and the conspiracy theories behind '*Who killed the electric car?*' have become fact, as far as many people are concerned.

And one of the people who apparently believed these conspiracy theories was Elon Musk.

Elon Musk did not start Tesla. It was started in 2003 by Martin Eberhard and Marc Tarpenning.

Elon Musk joined in early 2004, providing US$6.4 million in funding.



ANTI-GRAVITY CARS. In the far distant future motor-cars may be supported and propelled smoothly by invisible magnetic beams. This special Ford drawing shows what a "magnetic" highway of the future may be like. Above is a one-way passenger car tier; the tier below is reserved for goods traffic.

To Musk and friends, everything seemed possible. Tesla was a chance to stick it to the fossil fuels industry. It was also a chance to enjoy luxury personal motoring with a clean conscience. Because, in their hearts, rich Americans do not enjoy sharing spaces with strangers.

Elon Musk is on record as hating public transport.

"I think public transport is painful. It sucks...there's like a bunch of random strangers, one of who might be a serial killer, OK, great. And so that's why people like individualized transport, that goes where you want, when you want."

And, having said that, Elon Musk then began planning his own form of public transport, which consisted of boring underground tunnels beneath cities and filling them with high speed pods to carry people around. This type of scheme has been successfully tried before; it's called an underground railway.

But on Elon's underground railway, presumably, random strangers and serial killers would somehow be excluded.

Tesla's first electric car, the *Roadster*, was announced in 2006 and produced from 2008 to 2012. Based on an English *Lotus Elise*, the original vehicle was heavily modified to accomodate the massive battery packs required to power the electric motor. But, although the Tesla Roadster was far heavier than the Elise, it accelerated at supercar speeds and handled okay.

As a first attempt at building a car, the Roadster was impressive. But it never made money. This didn't matter to Elon, because in January 2010, Tesla received a $465 million loan from the U.S. Department of Energy, which it repaid from incoming investors' funds in 2013.

And June 29, 2010, Tesla Motors launched its initial public offering (IPO). Tesla's IPO saw investors fighting each other to invest in the upstart Tesla company.

SolarCity

As part of his new technology vision, in 2006 Musk financed his cousins Peter and Lyndon Rive to develop *SolarCity*, a solar energy company. In Elon's vision, SolarCity would establish a nationwide grid of solar panels to power his cars.

As with many companies associated with Elon, SolarCity was long on promises and short on reality.

For example, to quote *Wikipedia*, Tesla's *Giga New York* solar panel factory, which was built and equipped using nearly $1 billion in New York taxpayer money, "has faced criticism and legal actions regarding allegations of inflated job promises, cost overruns, construction delays, bid rigging, a perceived lack of effort from Musk, and claims that the deal was, in effect, a bailout of Musk's cousins Peter and Lyndon Rive...."

"The New York state comptroller released a 'scathing' audit of the project, concluding that it produced only 54 cents in economic benefits for every $1 spent by the state (compared to the benchmark set for these types of projects of $30 in economic benefits for every $1 spent)."

After multiple losses, the SolarCity company was quietly absorbed into Tesla in 2016. This triggered a 10% drop in Tesla's stock price, which speaks for itself.


FINANCIAL TIMES

Banking's Black Monday

Day of reckoning on Wall St

AIG thrown $20bn lifeline

But Musk was lucky to be still in business in 2016; he was almost wiped in the 2008 Global Financial Crisis.

Thanks to financial deregulation and a system that encouraged reckless speculation, the market became so overheated that it simply collapsed.

Many of Tesla's customers were wealthy investors who got their fingers very badly burnt in the Global Financial Crisis. So, Tesla suddenly lost many of its most important customers.

Musk invested another US$40 million into Tesla, but that wasn't enough.

He had to loan the company another US$40 million more. These investments effectively gave Elon control of the company and he was named the company's CEO the same year.

But all of Musk's investments – including Tesla – were bleeding money, leading him to describe 2008 as "the worst year of my life."

Justine Musk

To add to his misery, Musk was also going through a divorce from his Canadian wife Justine Musk. The two had six sons.

Musk didn't stay single for long: in 2008, Musk began dating actress Talulah Riley. They were married in 2010 but divorced two years later, only to remarry a year after that. After several messy years the couple were finally divorced in 2016.

Elon then dated actress Amber Heard for a year, before hooking up with Canadian singer-songwriter Grimes. The two have since had a child.

Musk opposed US government assistance to Covid 19 victims. But he wasn't opposed to a government bailout of his own business. Musk's business empire was saved by a quiet deal with the US government that saw SpaceX land a US$1.5 billion contract with NASA to deliver supplies into space. With that contract in place, Musk's investors began to return to his other businesses, including Tesla.

Hyperloop

In 2013, Musk unveiled a concept for the hyperloop: a high-speed underground transportation system that was essentially a magnetically-levitated, vacuum-powered train.

Inevitably, Elon claimed that long distance hyperloop travel would soon be cheaper than any other mode of transport.

However, to date, hyperloop is yet another interesting idea that has been oversold and under-delivered.

In 2016, Musk formed *The Boring Company* to dig tunnels, but the Boring Company mission was to create tunnels for electric vehicles to help them avoid traffic. In other words, Musk wanted to move traffic jams underground. But Musk's plan to run electric cars along rails at speeds as high as 241kp/h is simply another form of train. It's not a hyperloop system.

Also, invariably, Musk made big promises that never happened. For example, Musk promised that a 10 kilometre hyperloop tunnel' would be built by 2020. But 2020 came and went without any such tunnel.

Elon Musk said he was too busy with Tesla and Space X to build a hyperloop. In other words, after four years of hype, another of Elon's overhyped projects came to nothing.

Still, Musk's idea has inspired around a dozen companies to develop hyperloop systems.

Musk's main rival, Virgin Hyperloop, is a bit closer to getting a prototype system built, but there's still not a working commercial hyperloop system operating, or close to operating, anywhere in the world.

“That pedo guy”

On 23 June, 2018, 12 members of *Wild Boars* soccer team went exploring Thailand’s *Tham Luang* caves with their coach. The Tham Luang caves are a popular adventure trek; the trip was a birthday treat for one of the boys.

However, deep inside the cave, the Wild Boars found themselves trapped by sudden rising waters.

With the whole world watching, a full-blown rescue operation quickly unfolded.

But the rescue seemed almost impossible. Even the elite Thai Navy Seals, who had little experience with cave diving, had no real rescue plan.

Many nations wished to help: a series of international experts poured into Thailand.

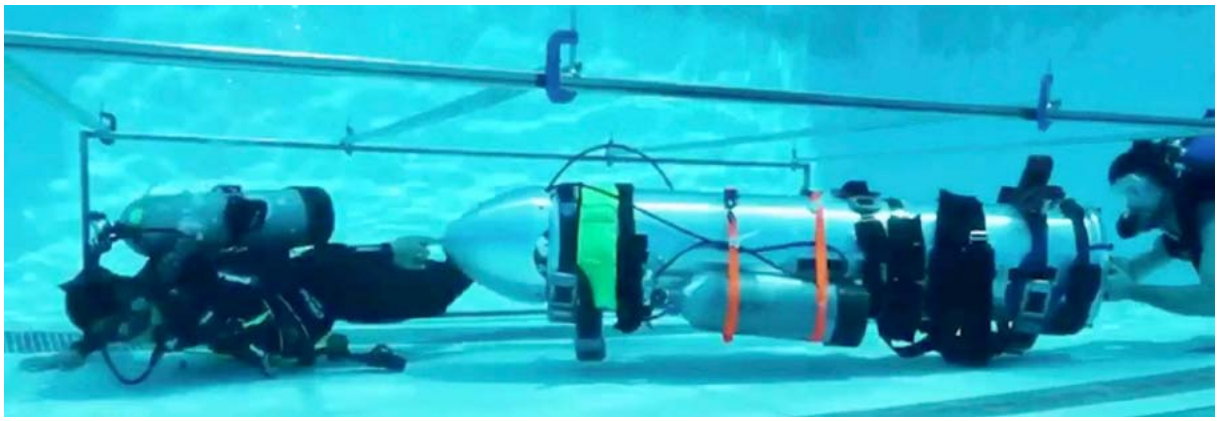
However the caves were now flooded and it was widely suspected that the boys and their coach had already perished.

However, on Thursday 28 June, two British divers, John Volanthen and Rick Stanton, braved the treacherous conditions and found the boys and their coach alive.

There were global celebrations, but rescuers were alarmed at the risks involved in getting the team out alive. Many of the boys couldn't swim, and rescue involved navigating 4km of flooded caves that frightened even experienced divers.

One Thai ex-Navy Seal drowned while delivering vital air tanks to the boys.

Into this catastrophe stepped Elon Musk. Long on enthusiasm and short on knowledge, Musk offered a kid-sized submarine.



The rescuer organisers immediately rejected Musk's submarine for the simple reason that it wouldn't fit through the tighter parts of the caves.

Vern Unsworth, the British cave explorer who was assisting the Thai government in organising the rescute efforts, was scathing:

"It just had absolutely no chance of working," he said. "[Musk has] no conception of what the cave passage [is] like. The submarine, I believe, was about 5ft 6in (1676mm) long [and] rigid, so it wouldn't have gone round corners or round any obstacles."

Instead, the rescuers, putting their own lives on the line, gave each boy full-face air mask to ensure they could breathe, and clipped each boy to a diver.

The boys were then heavily sedated so they would not panic. Panicking children were likely to drown both themselves and their rescuers.

In narrow sections, rescuers had to unstrap their air tanks in order to fit through the tiny gaps, while also pulling the unconcious boys through safely.

One by one, over three days, the children and their coach were rescued alive.

There was still a major risk: still trapped inside the caves were the Navy SEAL divers, a medic and Richard Harris, a famed Australian cave diving expert and doctor. This remaining group got out just as the caves flooded.

The world exploded with joy, with one exception: Elon Musk was miffed that the organisers of the rescue had rejected his minature submarine.

Musk (without any supporting evidence) then lashed out at Unsworth, claiming that Unsworth was a "child rapist". Musk also claimed he would make a video proving that his mini-sub would have been successful, adding: "Sorry pedo guy, you really did ask for it."

Unsworth sued for libel, but Teflon Elon got away with it again. Musk was helped by America's notoriously ineffective libel laws. Musk was also able to convince the jury that he was only joking. Except he wasn't.

Elon Musk had previously emailed *BuzzFeed News*, telling a reporter:

"I suggest that you call people you know in Thailand, find out what's actually going on and stop defending child rapists, you fucking arsehole."

Musk (again, without providing a shred of evidence) also alleged that Unsworth had a child bride who was about 12 years old at the time.

In fact, no evidence against Unsworth has ever turned up, and clearly, Musk has the resources to find such evidence if it existed.

It's pretty clear that Musk was having a tantrum that involved him publicly smearing Unsworth's reputation, merely because Unsworth hurt Elon's feelings.


NASA/Kim Shiflett

And so the Musk story continues. No matter how many times he's caught bullshitting, his adoring fans forgive him. He's their messiah.

Thus, in 2021, Elon Musk became the world's richest man. Based on what? His image as superman. But the cracks were already showing.

In early 2021, Will Dunn, business editor of the *New Statesman*, crunched Tesla's numbers and concluded: "at its current price-to-earnings ratio, it would take Tesla almost 1600 years to make as much money as the stockmarket has invested in it."

For decades, both Donald Trump and Elon Musk made brilliant careers out of their cult images as savvy entrepreneurs. No matter how often they were caught lying or failing to deliver on promises, their fame was undimmed.

Trump then became president of the United States, and Musk became top dog at Tesla.

But eventually, Trump's promises and his actions caught up with him. Suddenly, the man who could do no wrong in the eyes of his adoring followers, was out of office and had few friends.

Some time soon, Elon Musk is likely to face much the same fate as ex-US president Donald Trump.

As the saying goes:

"You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."