

# Tesla Model S: The 2013 Yahoo! Autos Car of the Year

By Marco R. della Cava | [Motoramic](#) – 3 hours ago



The 2013 model year brought consumers a fleet of new machines, and the editors and writers of Yahoo! Autos tested over 100 new models this year, from the brutish [Ford Shelby GT500](#) to the gas-sipping [Toyota Prius C](#). But all those appear to be automotive afterthoughts when compared to that futureshock of an electric sedan and Yahoo! Autos' Car of the Year: the Tesla Model S.

PayPal co-founder Elon Musk's foray into the car game started in 2008 with the nimble Tesla Roadster, a Lotus Elise makeover that swapped an internal combustion engine for a suitcase full of lithium-ion battery packs. But where that coupe was a high-tech experiment disguised as a \$100,000 eco-conscious status symbol, the seven-passenger, \$50,000-on-up Model S sedan promised to be a make-or-break machine that would determine whether Silicon Valley-based Tesla Motors can survive as a legitimate purveyor of reliable everyday cars.

The result? While the company and its car still have hurdles to overcome before either becomes a streetside staple, the Model S is the year's most noteworthy automobile for the way Tesla has erased long-perceived limitations of electric cars (poor range, small size, spartan interiors) and, going where no established automaker has yet to tread, creating an uncompromised yet practical object of desire.

A day spent driving a top-of-the-range Model S Signature Performance Edition on Bay Area backroads and freeways revealed the Tesla's split personality. A price tag of \$105,000 puts this iteration squarely in the premium luxury camp, shoulder to sheetmetal shoulder with the likes of [BMW M5](#) and [7 series](#), [Audi S6 and A8](#), and [Porsche Panamera S](#). But the Model S can hang in such company from both performance and pampering standpoints.

While the Model S is content to quietly amble down the road as you take in its optional 580-watt Studio Sound Package (\$950) stereo, simply flexing your right foot turns the car into a stealth fighter. Instant torque (and a 4.4-second zero-to-60 mph time) puts fellow travelers in your rear view mirror fast and without drama. That same composure is evident when carving up winding roads, thanks in large part to floor-stashed batteries that lower the car's center of gravity and provide its 265-mile range. The Tesla Roadster does the same thing; only now you've got your parents and your small kids plus some groceries along for the ride.



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Stepping outside the vehicle, it's hard not to like the rakish exterior designed by ex-Mazda stylist Franz von Holzhausen, which splits the difference between a [Jaguar XJ](#) and an [Audi A7](#). The one huge advantage of the Model S over any of those competitors is ample front and rear trunk space (so big that a \$1,500 option is a pair of rear-facing seats for small children).

Inside, the Model S favors a modernist look, with unadorned door panels, ample room thanks to a lack of transmission tunnel and a noticeable absence of dash buttons courtesy of the car's true calling card: a 17-inch center-console screen with Apple-like operability.

The massive display allows full connectivity to the Web, grants total control over the car's various systems and provides a navigation map that is nothing short of mesmerizing. The genesis of the interface was the aviation industry, where almost all commercial jets have swapped gauges for large-panel LCD screens, says J.B. Straubel, Tesla's co-founder and CTO who previously founded electric aviation company Volacom.

"We think that's where the trend is going in the automotive industry, so we wanted as much (screen) real estate as we could fit in the car," he says. "This will be the new normal."

But there's a ways to go before Tesla's products become ubiquitous. For starters, Model S owners have reported a range of glitches in online forums, including door handles that freeze (they're motorized affairs that extend out when touched), wiper arms that break (they exert tremendous force on a dry windshield and can be triggered by drops of sap), and a range of software glitches (perhaps to be expected given that the car is genuinely a computer on wheels). When Yahoo! Autos' editorial director Greg Anderson first received the Model S test car, it refused to drive for no particular reason -- then suddenly sprung to life. He also reported that the driver's door required a slam to shut properly, and the massive panorama sunroof made a grinding noise while closing.

Tesla is being aggressive about addressing those issues, but also has bigger fish to fry. Financially, so far it has stayed afloat thanks to a range of investors and loans from the Department of Energy. But ultimate survival will depend on a genuine marketplace embrace of both the Model S and the forthcoming Model X, a four-door mini-ute that should be priced a bit downmarket from the S. Critical to the adoption of both cars, however, is the continued rollout of Tesla's Supercharger stations, electric version of traditional gas stations. So far, there are six spread out across California that allow drivers to add three hours of highway cruising time in a 30-minute pit stop. And the company's strategy of selling its cars only online with factory-owned showrooms around the country has drawn two lawsuits from traditional dealers.

As for current S production, Musk's early October blog post noted that 359 Model S sedans had been completed at the company's Fremont, Calif, plant, with 250 actually delivered. While Musk congratulated workers two days ago for [building the 1,000 Model S bodies](#), the factory's pace will have to be sped up to meet its financial targets. Tesla officials say they have 13,000 \$5,000 reservations for Model S sedans; the goal is to have 3,000

It's hard to imagine using the words "EV" and "fun" in the same sentence. But the Tesla Model S is a fantastically engaging car to drive. The sheer power available under your right foot (at any speed) is something only an electric vehicle can offer, but in the Model S, it evokes a unique emotion unfelt before in the EV market. The ride is silky smooth, yet remains sporty at the same time. The futuristic 17-inch touchscreen is masterfully intuitive. Add all this up and it ensures the Tesla Model S becomes more than just our car of the year. It's the car of the future. — Alex Lloyd

cars produced by the end of 2012 (1,200 of those being the pricey Signature edition) and ideally make between 20,000 to 30,000 cars a year going forward.

Those are lofty aspirations, but then again Musk likes to aim for the stars; consider that his other company, SpaceX, intends to put tourists into orbit. Many automotive trailblazers -- from Preston Tucker to John DeLorean -- failed because they tried to change so much of the automotive business at once. There's no more complicated manufacturing on earth than building cars, and the next few weeks will be crucial to Tesla's survival. Yet it doesn't change what Tesla's team of free thinkers has already accomplished; the Model S may not be a rocket to outer space, but it is the most significant automobile to land on our roads in many a moon.

*Photography: Hana Krulova, for Yahoo! Autos*