



TechTalk

Elon Musk©

by John McCarthy

Hi and a very warm welcome once again to TechTalk. Today, we're devoting the programme to Elon Musk, a name with which perhaps some of you are unfamiliar, but when the history of the 21st century is eventually written, he might well be considered as one of the outstanding visionaries of this period. He first rose to prominence as a co-founder of PayPal, but it's more in the automobile industry that he's made a name for himself by bringing electric cars to the attention of a mobility-hungry public.

Musk is considered as cofounder of Tesla, a company whose primary objective has always been to produce an electric car for the mass market and encourage the public to make the transition to this more eco-friendly mode of transport, funding its development through sales of high-end, high-performance cars. Tesla's Model 3, unveiled earlier this year in March, could well be the modern-day equivalent to Henry Ford's iconic Model T and take electric vehicles mainstream. With a 345 km range, acceleration of 0-60 in six seconds and a \$35,000 price tag in the States, the company has taken over 400,000 pre-orders worldwide – that's \$14 billion in potential sales. This unexpected success means that Tesla will have to rethink their initial plans and ramp up production to half a million cars annually by 2018. Musk has also announced plans to build the world's largest battery factory at a cost of \$5 billion dollars, which is currently under construction in partnership with Panasonic. This has promoted accelerated development in other companies, and there have been reports in the media that Volkswagen is also planning a multi-billion Euro battery factory as part of a major expansion of its electric car portfolio. Here in France, you can now pre-order your Tesla Model 3 by visiting the website and leaving a €1,000 deposit, but do bear in mind that Euro prices, which will almost certainly be higher than the previously mentioned \$35,000 figure, will probably be announced in 2017.

Another project involving Musk is the hyper-loop, a low-cost alternative to railways and other public transport. In a nutshell, the idea is that individual pods would travel at over 1,200 km/h through a vacuum-filled steel tube. This is still in its experimental phase, tests are currently being conducted in California and a prototype test is tentatively scheduled for the end of this year. Slovakia may well prove to be the first country in the world to adopt this innovation which could – hyperbole aside – genuinely revolutionise transportation and redefine the very concept of commuting, as you could live literally hundreds of kilometres from your office and be in your place of work faster than it takes

to travel between Juvisy-sur-Orge and Saint Michel on the RER C – industrial action permitting. The Slovakian government hopes to link the cities of Bratislava, Vienna and Budapest. SpaceX, the only private company ever to return a spacecraft from low-Earth orbit and headed by you-know-who, is also hosting a competition for student teams and expert independent engineering groups to design the best hyper-loop capsule.

Musk's vision of the hyper-loop extends far beyond the confines of our own cherished pale blue dot. When asked if he'd had any thoughts on the extra-terrestrial application of the hyper-loop, here's what he said, while humorously giving his own products a plug in the process...

"Yeah, actually on Mars, you basically just need a track, because on Earth, the air density is quite high, but on Mars it's 1% of Earth's atmospheric density, but it would obviously have to be electric, because there's no oxygen, so you would have to have really fast electric cars or trains or things. Electric aircraft, alright, sure!"

That's it for today; do join me for some more TechTalk next week here on englishwaves.fr.