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Tesla Leads a Rush to Sell Electric Cars That Cost More Than \$100,000

Elon Musk's company and other automakers, like Jaguar and Bentley, are trying to sell very expensive electric cars to people who usually prefer gasoline-fueled luxury and performance.



A prototype of the Tesla Roadster in 2022. The automaker is expected to unveil the production vehicle, which is expected to cost at least \$200,000, on Thursday. Credit...Suzanne Cordeiro/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images



By [Jack Ewing](#)

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Sales of electric vehicles are booming in much of the world as people look for ways to avoid gyrating fuel prices at the mercy of geopolitics.

But automakers are aiming a new fleet of electric cars at people who are not worried about prices at the pump and normally have garages full of vehicles with brawny, gas guzzling engines.

On Thursday, Tesla is scheduled to unveil the Roadster, an incarnation of the company's first car, which will sell for at least \$200,000. Elon Musk, Tesla's chief executive, has said the Roadster will be able to go from zero to 60 miles per hour in a second, acceleration usually found only on drag strips.

The debut of the Roadster at an event late on Thursday will come a week after Jaguar, once famous for powerful 12-cylinder engines, showed off a 1,000-horsepower battery-powered beast it calls the Type 01, which starts at \$130,000. The vehicle is the first new model by the British luxury brand, a unit of Tata Motors, after it decided to focus exclusively on electric vehicles.

The Type 01 and Roadster are bets that well-heeled aficionados will buy electric vehicles for their silent, fast acceleration and road handling, rather than gas savings.

Electric motors and batteries use energy more efficiently than internal combustion engines. They accelerate more quickly, require less maintenance and vibrate less. Heavy batteries give the cars a low center of gravity and improve handling.

When Jaguar was looking for a way to reinvent the brand, the decision to go electric was "obvious," Rawdon Glover, the company's managing director, said last week in an interview with The New York Times.

The Type 01 will be the first of several new models, including some that will be more affordable.

"A Jaguar should be fast, it should be comfortable, it should be luxurious, and in that context E.V. is the best mix of those elements," Mr. Glover said.

The new high-end models from Jaguar, Tesla and others are part of an effort by Western automakers to distinguish themselves from Chinese companies that dominate the market for affordable electric cars in much of the world except the United States.

But this is a risky strategy. Buyers of ultraluxurious vehicles and sports cars are some of the most passionate fans of large combustion engines, their vibrations and their sounds. Some of these drivers have eschewed electric vehicles, saying driving them is as thrilling as using an appliance.

Several high-priced electric vehicles have faltered. Sales of Porsche's electric Taycan, which starts at \$112,000, slumped 31 percent globally in the first nine months of the year, the company said this month. Porsche has scaled back its electric vehicle plans and, this month, said it would focus more on [higher-priced sports cars](#), most of which run on gasoline.

Lucid, which makes electric sedans and sport utility vehicles that start at \$70,000 but can go for as much as \$250,000, reported a 7 percent decline in sales for the third quarter.

Ferrari's electric [Luce](#), which starts at more than \$600,000, enraged many of the Italian company's fans when it was unveiled in May, though the model has reportedly sold well. Ferrari's archrival, Lamborghini, has postponed plans for an electric car.

Next year, Bentley, a unit of Volkswagen, plans to begin selling the Torcal, an electric S.U.V., with a starting price around \$220,000. Even Rolls-Royce, a unit of BMW, sells an E.V., the \$400,000 Spectre II.

Mr. Musk has acknowledged that the Roadster is unlikely to generate much revenue. The number of people with more than \$200,000 to spend on a car is very small. Buyers must put down a \$50,000 deposit to reserve a Roadster.

Some analysts have questioned why Tesla devoted resources to a costly project when sales of its mainstay Model Y and Model 3 are slipping. But other experts say the vehicle allows Tesla to burnish its status as a technology leader in electric vehicles.

"I think Tesla wants people to know they are able to deliver the highest-performing vehicle as an E.V. and go up against those brands, so they won't be viewed as just a mass-market company," said Ben Rose, president of Battle Road Research, who covers Tesla.

The first generation of luxury electric vehicles was rather bland, Mr. Glover said. To avoid that, Jaguar engineers drove classic Jaguars to figure out how to give the Type 01 the same road feel and handling of those earlier models. The Type 01 will be able to go from zero to 60 in 3.1 seconds.

The silhouette of the Type 01 echoes classic Jaguars like the XKE, with an elongated hood (or "bonnet," as the company's British designers call it) and a voluptuous "hip" in the rear. Designers moved some battery cells from under the seats, as is typical in most electric cars, to the front. That allowed a more low-slung profile.

Electric propulsion enables some features that are nearly impossible with gasoline cars. The wheels on the Jaguar, powered by three electric motors, can be tuned to roll at slightly different speeds to enhance handling.

Predictably, the online reaction among Jaguar fans was polarized. Some called the car beautiful, and others said it was "menacing and evil."

"There is going to be a group that says it doesn't have the voluptuousness the old ones have," said Mark Mayuga, president of Jaguar Clubs of North America. "My answer is, 'Let's do something new, something fresh.'"

Jack Ewing covers the auto industry for The Times, with an emphasis on electric vehicles.