

Last week a local newspaper in Dorset, England reported, “Driver Laurence Sanderson said he, his wife and three children, and the occupants of a second car coming in the opposite direction, would have ‘undoubtedly’ been killed by a falling 400-year-old oak tree - but in an extraordinary coincidence, both vehicles were self-driving Tesla Model X cars, which have automatic emergency brakes.” The cars both sensed the tree falling and stopped suddenly so it landed on their hoods and missed the occupants, saving everyone’s lives.

Automatic braking is just one feature that makes Tesla cars quite unlike any other. Let’s have a blast around 11 features that makes driving the Tesla range of cars and SUVs a different world from almost any other cars on the market.

1. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration gave the Tesla Model S a rating of 5.4 out of 5.

The passenger cabins of Teslas are so safe that the story in the newspaper above may well have reported that the passengers would have been saved from the tree even it had landed on the cars’ roofs. Why? In the NHTSA test, their machine for testing objects landing on the Model S roof broke before it was able to crush the cabin.

What this means for you is that these cars are incredibly safe, even when their electronics aren’t keeping an eye on you while you’re driving down the road.

2. Ludicrous and Insane Mode

For some reason Ludicrous Mode on the Model S P110D is even insaner than Insane Mode on the Model S P85D.

Ludicrous Mode has the bipolar outcome of accelerating like a cat off a hot tin roof (2.5 second to 60 anyone?) yet can also extend the range of the car to over 300 miles on a charge - the first ever electric car to manage this range.

Where it comes to acceleration, competitive types who are stood by a top end Ferrari or Lamborghini at the lights can put this mode on and put their foot down, leaving the gas guzzler struggling to even be on the same road let alone keeping up!

Insane Mode on the Model S P85D takes advantage of the dual motors to get the car up to 60 in an impressive 3.5 seconds, blowing most other cars off the road when you put your foot down. Who says that electric cars are boring old trolleys when they can embarrass drivers in cars ten times the price of them?

3. Full Self Driving (FSD)

This is an extra feature available to all Teslas built after 2016.

The first thing to say about this is that you should always have your hands on the wheel and foot ready to jam on the brakes - while one of the most advanced self-driving systems on the road today you can’t have a doze while it drives you everywhere! The car can sense whether your hands are on the driving wheel and will take measures to make you take control if you don’t, even slowing it down and putting on the hazard lights.

However it can get you over busy interchanges and put you in exactly the right lane on bigger roads,

and can do things like slow and stop the car on roads of speed limits up to 60mph. If the lights change on you you'll have to respond but if they do for the car in front the car will respond to it.

It's this cool front-end sensing, that's even on Teslas without FSD, that may have saved the two families' lives when the tree fell on their cars.

4. Standard Autopilot - lane departure and emergency lane departure

Emergency lane departure avoidance is a feature where if you haven't seen another vehicle and are about to change lanes into its way, or you're about to come off the road, the Tesla car will steer out of harm's way.

This is linked to the lane departure warning system where the car will sound an alarm if you change lanes without putting on your indicator to show other drivers your plans.

In both cases if these events take place too often the car will ultimately slow down and flash its hazard lights to warn other drivers you could be in trouble (perhaps in a medical emergency). In these cases authorities can slow you down and stop you without touching the car. How? They can surround your car and stop and the car's collision avoidance system will stop it - now that's pretty cool!

5. Navigate on Autopilot

Did you know that the car will drive you from A-B using its navigation system on Autopilot too? This means on most roads and in safe conditions you could literally tell the car where to go and rest your hands on the wheel while it takes you where you're going.

This is a feature that takes Tesla cars head and shoulders above its rivals. As ever you need to be sober, alert and have your hands on the wheel throughout as the car won't drive you without you doing it.

6. No need for a child lock!

As with all cars on the road today there is a standard child lock on the rear doors of Teslas to stop your little ones from falling out while playing in back as they do. But did you know that at speeds of over 5mph no doors will be operable from the inside anyway? You can only open the doors from the inside when the car has come to a complete stop. That means everyone is safe all the time.

There is one time you could regret this feature - in a car jacking there will be no escape until and unless the vehicle is at a standstill. Given that we're not the first to point this out we're sure that there will be an Over The Air update in good time that fixes this issue - perhaps you could say a code word and press the screen to unlock the doors and get away with your life? Who knows what the Tesla engineers will come up with?!

7. Reverse can be engaged while rolling forward

Unlike other cars where you have to put your foot on the brake and come to a standstill, you can tell a Tesla to go into reverse while it is moving forward. The car will come to a stop safely and then reverse.

Though it is only available while you're travelling at a maximum speed of 5mph, this is a feature that can allow you to maneuver more quickly and effectively.

8. Explicit lyrics bar on infotainment system

If you have kids in your car you won't want them hearing language that adults use. That's why Tesla have an 'explicit lyrics bar' on their infotainment system - all you need to do is check a box and you won't hear songs that may teach them language that you'd prefer they won't.

This is just one of a large number of family friendly features on the range that makes their cars so good for families to use. How many other automakers have thought so deeply about things like these?

9. Over The Air (OTA) updates

The car you lease from Steer today will be far better at the end of the lease term than it was when you drove it away. Sound strange? That's because Tesla releases regular OTA updates to the car's software where Tesla HQ can upgrade your car while it is in your garage or parking lot.

Improvements so far have included updating the Autopilot software so it can get you in exactly the right lane on the road in cities and highways where you need to be in a particular lane to change roads, turn right or left. Other refinements are made regularly, making every Tesla made after 2016 almost as good as one another.

Where there is a problem with an OTA you can send a report back to Tesla HQ (again without leaving the car) and they can come up with a software patch to fix it. That means that unlike certain operating software companies, the company will keep you on the road even if there is a bug in the code!

10. Model X - Bioweapon Defense Mode

Quite apart from being tailpipe-emissions free and saving others from breathing gunk from your driving, the Model X keeps the air inside just as clean inside as it does the air outside!

On the crossover Model X, there is a High-Efficiency Particulate Arrestance (HEPA) filter that cleans the air coming into your car to the same standards as a hospital operating room. On Bioweapon Defense Mode that could mean you could theoretically drive away after a terrorist 'dirty bomb' attack on your city and be perfectly safe inside.

What it means most of the time is that the dirty air of a city is cleaned by the car as it comes from outside and into the cabin. If you, a friend or relative have a lung condition such as asthma or COPD this means that you or they can breathe the air without risks of unwanted pollutants causing a reaction.

11. The Easter eggs!

We can't talk about Teslas without a word on their Easter eggs can we? These are little apps that you can find all over the autopilot and infotainment systems that can make life a little lighter while driving them. Let's have a look at a few of the best.

- Your kids (and not so young ones) will love the 'Emissions Testing' Easter egg where the car can make a range of different fart noises almost anywhere in the cabin thanks to its excellent sound system. Your children/menfolk can make it seem that anyone has farted in a range of different ways. As a word of warning, perhaps driving home after a night of bean burritos, the car can't make real smells...

- If you are taking a friend home after a date that's really gone well, perhaps you could switch on Romance Mode to get them in the mood - this is a log fire that appears on the main screen. A little warmth from the climate control system and appropriate music and you could set the mood perfectly as you go home for your after dinner entertainment.

- Beach Buggy Racing. With the car parked and stationary you can play this game on the main screen, using the actual steering wheel, brakes and accelerator to race the car on the screen around the course! This makes for a game control console that you just won't find anywhere else. You can even play a two player game with the passenger using the controls on the screen to race you.

There are dozens of other Easter eggs that will keep everyone happy, including fun the driver can have while driving it on Autopilot as well as the passengers old and young. Though most of them can be found on a dedicated screen, some can only be found by hitting the Tesla button in certain circumstances. Have a play and see what you can find!

The takeaway

From worthy safety ratings to gadgets to keep the kids happy, Tesla cars are totally different to those made by other automakers. Hopefully we've given you a flavor of just what's out there - and on leasing a car with us to go on your own journey of discovery to find out what else there is on these machines too!