

Tesla wants to electrify big trucks, adding to its ambitions

By Dee-Ann Durbin
AP Auto Writer

DETROIT — After more than a decade of making cars and SUVs — and, more recently, solar panels — Tesla Inc. wants to electrify a new type of vehicle: big trucks.

The company unveiled its new electric semitractor-trailer near its design center in Hawthorne, California.

CEO Elon Musk said the semi is capable of travelling 500 miles on an electric charge — even with a full 80,000-pound load — and will cost less than a diesel semi considering fuel savings, lower maintenance, and other factors. Musk said customers can put down a \$5,000 deposit for the semi now and production will begin in 2019.

“We’re confident that this is a product that’s better in every way from a feature standpoint,” Musk told a crowd of Tesla fans gathered for the unveiling. Musk didn’t reveal the semi’s price.

The truck will have Tesla’s Autopilot system, which can maintain a set speed and slow down automatically in traffic. It also has a system that automatically keeps the vehicle in its lane. Musk said several Tesla semis will be able to travel in a convoy, autonomously following each other.

Musk said Tesla plans a worldwide network of solar-powered “megachargers” that could get the trucks back up to 400 miles of range after charging for only 30 minutes.

The move fits with Musk’s stated goal for the company of accelerating the shift to sustainable transportation. Trucks account for nearly a quarter of transportation-related greenhouse-gas emissions



in the U.S., according to government statistics.

But the semi also piles on more chaos at the Palo Alto, California-based company. Tesla is way behind on production of the Model 3, a new lower-cost sedan, with some customers facing waits of 18 months or more. It’s also ramping up production of solar panels after buying Solar City Corp. last year. Tesla is working on a pickup truck and a lower-cost SUV and negotiating a new factory in China. Meanwhile, the company posted a record quarterly loss of \$619 million in its most recent quarter.

Also at the unveiling, Tesla surprised fans with another product: An updated version of its first sports car, the Roadster. Tesla says the new Roadster will have 620 miles of range and a top speed of 250 mph. The car, coming in 2020, will have a base price of \$200,000.

Musk, too, is being pulled in many directions. He leads rocket maker SpaceX and is dabbling in other projects, including high-speed transit, artificial-intelligence research, and a new company that’s digging tunnels beneath Los Angeles to

alleviate traffic congestion.

“He’s got so much on his plate right now. This could present another distraction from really just making sure that the Model 3 is moved along effectively,” said Bruce Clark, a senior vice president and automotive analyst at Moody’s.

Tesla’s semi is venturing into an uncertain market. Demand for electric trucks is expected to grow over the next decade as the U.S., Europe, and China all tighten their emissions regulations. Electric truck sales totalled 4,100 in 2016, but are expected to grow to more than 70,000 in 2026, says Navigant Research.

But most of that growth is expected to be for smaller, medium-duty haulers like garbage trucks or delivery vans. Those trucks can have a more limited range of 100 miles or less, which requires fewer expensive batteries. They can also be fully charged overnight.

Long-haul semi trucks, on the other hand, would be expected to go greater

Obama re-emerges on global stage with trip to Asia, France

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where he met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi, gave another speech, and held a town hall meeting hosted by Obama’s foundation. Throughout his presidency, Obama often used the popular events in foreign countries to take questions about everything from politics and policy to his personal story and pop culture.

Obama gave a final speech over the weekend in Paris before returning to the United States.

Aides to the former president declined to say who was paying for the trip, but said he was compensated for the speeches.

The trip comes as Trump is aggressively pushing China’s leaders to cut off North Korea economically over its nuclear weapons program. Obama was also in India just days after Trump’s daughter and senior adviser, Ivanka Trump. The first daughter gave a speech at a business conference that was widely disseminated on Indian television.

Since taking office, Trump has reversed much of Obama’s foreign policy approach, including pulling out of a global climate change agreement that was forged after the U.S. and China teamed up on the issue. Trump has also irked France and other European allies by taking steps to undermine the nuclear deal that the U.S. and world powers struck with Iran in 2015.

Whatever Obama says about current events while abroad will surely be viewed through that heavily politicized lens. But historians said former presidents often try to mitigate the risk that their visits undermine their successor by coordinating with the current White House in advance.

“When it’s done right, the former president will check in before he goes, and see if there’s anything he should or shouldn’t do or say. It’s a longstanding tradition,” said Michael Duffy, author of *The Presidents Club: Inside the World’s Most Exclusive Fraternity*.

An Obama aide wouldn’t say whether the former president or his staff had contacted Trump’s White House ahead of

ELECTRIFYING NEWS. Tesla Inc. wants to electrify a new type of vehicle: big trucks. The company unveiled its new electric semitractor-trailer near its design center in Hawthorne, California. The move fits with Tesla CEO Elon Musk’s stated goal for the company of accelerating the shift to sustainable transportation. (Tesla via AP)

distances, and that would be challenging. Right now, there’s little charging infrastructure on global highways. Without Tesla’s promised fast-charging, even a mid-sized truck would likely require a two-hour stop, cutting into company efficiency and profits, says Brian Irwin, managing director of the North American industrial group for the consulting firm Accenture.

Irwin says truck companies will have to watch the market carefully, because tougher regulations on diesels or an improvement in charging infrastructure could make electric trucks more viable very quickly. Falling battery costs also will help make electric trucks more appealing compared to diesels.

But even lower costs won’t make trucking a sure bet for Tesla. It faces stiff competition from long-trusted brands like Daimler AG, which recently unveiled its own semi prototype.

“These are business people, not fans, and they will need [to be] convinced that this truck is better for their balance sheet than existing technology. It probably is, based on the specs provided, but this isn’t necessarily a slam dunk,” said Rebecca Lindland, an executive analyst at Kelley Blue Book.

Musk said Tesla will guarantee the semi’s powertrain for one million miles to help alleviate customers’ concerns.

the trip, but said Obama’s staff had reached out to the U.S. embassies in each country. The aide wasn’t authorized to comment by name and requested anonymity. Former presidents retain Secret Service protection, so there’s at least some U.S. government involvement in facilitating the trip.

Obama isn’t the first ex-president to get the itch to travel after losing access to Air Force One.

By the time President Bill Clinton was out of office for four months, he’d already visited 10 countries, including China and India. Though then-President George W. Bush had adopted a far different foreign policy, Clinton was careful on the road not to criticize his successor directly.

President Jimmy Carter was sometimes criticized for overstepping his role as ex-president during his extensive overseas travels in the years after he left the Oval Office. In the years after World War II, former President Herbert Hoover travelled prolifically, helping secure food supplies for Europeans in need. Theodore Roosevelt gave a famous “Man in the Arena” speech at the Sorbonne in Paris as an ex-president.

Sumo wrestler Harumafuji retires over assault allegations

By Jim Armstrong
AP Sports Writer

TOKYO — Mongolian grand champion Harumafuji has decided to retire from sumo after allegations he assaulted a lower-ranked wrestler and tarnished the image of Japan’s national sport.

“I have caused much trouble to society,” Harumafuji said at a packed media conference. “I want to apologize to various people in the sumo federation who have supported me. As a grand champion, I have done something that shouldn’t be done.”

The news dominated Japanese television talk shows and evening newspapers for weeks as the nation expressed shock at

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