

TESLA

HANDS-ON ELECTRIC CAR SHOPPING AT FASHION SQUARE

There's no denying it's unusual to head down to the car dealership ... inside a mall ... located across from the Microsoft store. Then again, Tesla doesn't make the usual kind of car.

But this isn't about being different. Tesla has determined that the kind of buyer they work with shops a little differently, buys a little differently and certainly thinks a little differently—all of that in a good way. And their new retail plan is targeted right at them. Not only does such a retail location seek to capture their target customers when they're already in a high-style mood and in shopping form, the location offers up-close looks at technology and features that insiders may see at the Geneva Motor Show, but the general buying public generally doesn't see in a dealer showroom.

Tesla has 22 company-owned stores and galleries worldwide, with twelve new locations opening during 2012, mostly in North America. Their new retail Design Studio at Scottsdale Fashion Square, which opened in mid-July, is one of four that launched over the summer. Tesla calculates that these retail locations will "entice, inform and engage," in ways a traditional roadside dealership cannot. The concept makes sense, particularly for a boutique brand bristling with the newest technology.

THE TESLA MODEL S

Tesla has a stated goal of accelerating the world's transition to electric mobility with a full range of cars that are increasingly affordable. Their first offering, the two-seat Tesla Roadster, was priced over \$100,000. They seem to be delivering on their premise, as their latest offering, the Tesla Model S, is a luxury five-seater starting at \$57,400 (or typically just \$49,900 after varying tax credits). The Model S is stated to be the world's first premium sedan that was engineered from the ground up as an electric vehicle. (Even the breakthrough electric Roadster was cleverly adapted from a Lotus Elise.)

With a roofline that sweeps all the way back to a slight spoiler lip at the rear, Tesla is calling the Model S a sportback sedan, suggesting it leans toward the Audi A7 and Mercedes-Benz CLS-Class four-door coupe concept. With conventional seating for five adults, the Tesla Model S also has an option to add seating for two children, with rear-facing child seats. All these folks benefit from the presence of a second trunk under the hood.

The Model S body uses aluminum-intensive design for weight-saving, strength and exceptional rigidity. This is a solid foundation for the battery packs and, in the event of collision, protects occupants with energy-

absorbing crumple zones.

The Model S can plug into any conventional 120v or 240v outlet to charge, or can be charged to 50 percent battery capacity in just 30 minutes with a cleverly named Tesla Supercharger.

The Model S is being offered at first with three battery pack options: 40, 60 or 85 kWh. Aptly for this pioneering high-end brand, the Model S claims the longest range of any electric vehicle in production—265 miles of EV range with the 85 kWh battery (using a 5-cycle EPA test procedure).

The first 1,000 Model S Signature Series cars were for North America, and customer deliveries began in June. These have an 85 kWh battery pack, unique badging and an extensive option list. For the second half of 2012, Tesla plans to produce about 5,000 Model S sedans, before ramping up to build 20,000 units for 2013. The first 85 kWh sedans are to be followed by cars with the 60 and 40 kWh battery pack options.

The instrument panel is centered on a huge 17-inch touchscreen panel with 3G connectivity, which works with a digital cluster and steering wheel controls to integrate audio, internet, navigation, communications, cabin controls and vehicle data. The display responds to tap, swipe and zoom gestures and is built upon a software-based user interface, enabling continuous evolution of functionality—a much-welcomed approach.

We didn't drive the car during our tour of the store, but it is engineered for comfortable yet engaging ride and handling, and—as with any pure electric vehicle—acceleration will be immediate, linear and powerful. Available air suspension (standard on Signature and Performance models) responds to speed and road conditions, lowering the car as it accelerates, for optimized aerodynamics and increased range. And the car can be raised and lowered (using the touchscreen) for everything from deep snow to steep driveways.

By mid-July when the Scottsdale Fashion Square store opened, Tesla had already taken more than 10,000 reservations for Model S worldwide.

SHOPPING AT THE TESLA STORE

When you visit the Tesla Design Studio at Fashion Square, you can not only slip inside and try it on for size, check out the trunk and look under the hood, but you can learn about the Tesla S through a hands-on chassis and drivetrain, plus interactive touchscreen displays (and live product specialists) with a world of information about Tesla's technologies and the benefits of driving electric, plus an easy process to customize and purchase your own Tesla S—or at least some Tesla sportswear.

And yes, you can still hop in and go for a test drive. The mall has a whole parking area devoted to the Tesla dealership, wired for charging, out of the sun, and ready to go when you are.

When your new car is ready, you can upgrade to a Tesla Personal Delivery, and have the car delivered wherever you choose: home, work, your friend's house, a hotel, anywhere you find convenient or can't resist making an impact. At delivery, a product specialist will take you for one more walk through the car's features, before turning you loose. Or you can take delivery from Tesla in Fremont, California, and take a factory tour.

Add the new Tesla store to your shopping list. ■

Where the roads are dry and the cars are slick.



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