

20. Founders

In the early 2000s, Jeffrey Brian (JB) Straubel, Martin Eberhard, and Marc Tarpenning emerged as pivotal figures in the transformative journey of electric vehicles (EVs), leading to the foundation of Tesla Motors. JB, a Wisconsin native fascinated with electric vehicles from a young age, pursued his passion through various experiments, including converting an old Porsche into an electric car during his time at Stanford. Despite his innovative efforts, financial backers were initially elusive until a pivotal meeting with Elon Musk, who was then exploring entrepreneurial space ventures. Musk's interest in electric vehicles and energy storage synergized with Straubel's vision, leading to Musk providing initial funding support.

Simultaneously, Martin Eberhard, a Silicon Valley entrepreneur motivated by environmental concerns and the inefficiency of gasoline vehicles, embarked on a quest to create an electric car that could rival conventional sports cars in performance and appeal. His search led him to the tzero prototype by AC Propulsion, inspiring him to start his own EV company. Eberhard's collaboration with Marc Tarpenning, who shared a similar vision, resulted in the foundation of Tesla Motors in 2003, named after the inventor of the induction motor, Nikola Tesla.

The intersection of these pioneers' paths occurred when Musk's search for innovative electric vehicle projects led him to Straubel and subsequently to Eberhard and Tarpenning. Despite initial resistance from AC Propulsion to commercialize the tzero, Musk's encounter with the prototype confirmed his belief in the potential of electric cars to change the world. His insistence on creating a high-quality, high-performance EV, contrary to the initial inclination for a lower-priced model, set the stage for the creation of Tesla's first product, a high-end roadster aimed at demonstrating the superiority of electric vehicles.

Thus, a blend of Musk's financial backing and vision, Straubel's technical expertise, and Eberhard and Tarpenning's entrepreneurial drive and environmental ethos culminated in the launch of Tesla Motors. This venture not only aimed to revolutionize the automotive industry with electric vehicles but also sought to establish a sustainable energy future, setting a precedent for the next generation of electric mobility.