

14. Mars

After being ousted from PayPal, Elon Musk, driven by a deep-rooted interest in aerospace and influenced by his family's history of flying, purchased a single-engine turboprop to learn flying. Despite initially failing his Instrument Flight Rules test, his perseverance led to success on his second attempt. His passion for aviation evoked a desire for more thrilling experiences, culminating in the acquisition of a Soviet Bloc military jet, the Aero L-39 Albatros, allowing him to delve deeper into aerodynamics and the nuances of flight.

Musk's journey took a pivotal turn during a Labor Day weekend in 2001, following a severe bout with malaria. A conversation during a drive back from the Hamptons with his friend Adeo Ressi ignited Musk's dormant aspirations to venture into space exploration. This conversation transformed into a firm belief that private individuals could indeed contribute significantly to space exploration, a stark contrast to the prevailing notion that such endeavors were solely within the domain of national agencies like NASA.

Upon the stark realization that NASA had no immediate plans for Mars exploration, and feeling disillusioned with the state of technological advancement in aerospace, Musk attended a dinner hosted by the Mars Society. This event further solidified his determination to contribute to space exploration, fostering connections with influential figures like film director James Cameron and Mars Society president Robert Zubrin. It was here that Musk's vision to make mankind a multiplanetary civilization began to crystallize, marking a shift from his previous tech-driven ventures.

Musk's motivations were multifaceted, encompassing a mix of technological stagnation fears, the existential threat to humanity, and a profound belief in the pioneering spirit, ingrained in him by his family history and personal ethos. Viewing the advancement to a multiplanetary existence as an epochal step in human evolution, Musk embarked on a journey, fueled by an unyielding passion for space exploration and a mission-driven approach to transcend financial and technological barriers.

The decision to relocate to Los Angeles, a hub for aerospace talents, underscored his commitment. This move, initially perceived by Justine (Musk's then-wife) as a lure towards the city's glamour, was a strategic step towards assembling a team of rocket engineers. By hosting meetings near the Los Angeles airport, Musk initiated the foundational stages of what would later become a monumental venture in aerospace, marking the beginning of SpaceX. Musk's transition from an internet entrepreneur to a pioneering space explorer showcases a relentless pursuit of humanity's expansion beyond Earth, blending his technical acumen with an audacious dream to colonize Mars.