

Tesla owners turn against Musk: embarrassed driving this car around

The electric car brand was once a liberal favourite – but the CEO's embrace of Trump has led to an angry backlash

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As Elon Musk has embraced Donald Trump and various far-right conspiracy theories, he has left behind an aghast cohort of [Tesla](#) owners who suddenly feel embarrassed by their own cars. Many of them are now publicly displaying their dismay at Musk on their vehicles.

Sales of anti-Musk stickers have boomed since the world's richest man declared his support for Trump and helped propel him to victory in the US presidential election, as owners of Teslas, the car brand headed by Musk, try to distance themselves from the South African-born multibillionaire.

“Sales have really spiked. The day after the election was the biggest day ever,” said Matt Hiller, a Hawaii-based aquarium worker who sells a range of stickers online that denounce Musk. “People saw a billionaire supervillain buy his way into the administration and it rubbed them the wrong way.”

Elon Musk has cozied into Trump's White House. How long will this bromance last?

Hiller started the sticker range last year after deciding against buying a Tesla due to Musk's “amplifying of horrible people and silencing of others” on X, formerly Twitter, another of his companies. Several hundred stickers a day are now being sold, primarily to Tesla owners, Hiller said, bearing texts

such as “Anti Elon Tesla Club” or “I Bought This Before Elon Went Crazy”, or a picture of Musk in clown makeup with the words “Space Clown”.

“People keep telling me that they feel they can drive their Teslas again with these stickers,” said Hiller, who has had to set aside part of his house to accommodate the growing operation. Hiller devises slogans such as “Elon Ate My Cat”, a reference to a debunked falsehood about migrants eating pets in Ohio, that are then sold on Etsy and Amazon. “People are shaken up. It’s a relief really to see they are awake,” he said of the surging demand. Musk, who has an estimated wealth of \$314bn, was once considered an environmental hero and technology pioneer by many US liberals after turning Tesla into the most valuable car company in the world while warning that “climate change is the biggest threat that humanity faces this century, except for AI”.

But his reputation among electric vehicle-buying liberals curdled as he used X to trumpet far-right conspiracies, fulminated about the “woke mind virus” and enthusiastically promoted Trump, even appearing at the president-elect’s rallies and funding campaign operations for him in key battleground states.

Musk is now intimately involved in Trump’s incoming administration, heading a new “Department of Government Efficiency” that plans mass layoffs of US government workers. Some Tesla owners have been left horrified. “I thought Elon was progressing our country, but he’s turned out to be kind of an evil person. It’s scary for someone with that sort

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of money to be so close to a politician,” said Mika Houston, a gymnastics teacher in Las Vegas who has had a Tesla Model 3 for the past three years. “I still love my car, but I think about whether I’m endorsing that sort of behavior when I drive it. I’m embarrassed driving this car around after the election, thinking about the man behind it,” said Houston, who has bought an “Anti Elon Tesla Club” magnet for her car and is mulling whether to sell it. Pamela Perkins, a photographer who lives in the Tesla heartland of California’s Silicon Valley, has a Model Y but is among a group of friends who are all considering ditching their Teslas.

“I’m turning 80 in January so I thought I’d have a sporty car that I could race anyone when the light turns green,” Perkins said of her purchase. “There was a time I thought Elon Musk was a genius but he went bad very quickly. I remember saying to my husband I should sell this car and send a message, for my own conscience.

“A lot of people have asked if I’m going to sell the car, I have a friend who was about to get a Tesla but decided not to because of him. But [Musk] doesn’t care about us, he has bigger fish to fry. He wants to colonize Mars.” It’s unclear whether this backlash against Musk will hurt Tesla, which remains the dominant electric car company in the US. Sales have struggled somewhat this year, with a 7% drop forecast in the latest quarter compared with the same period in 2023, although analysts put this down to increased competition from other car makers and a stale Tesla lineup that has little changed apart from the much-hyped Cybertruck.

“Tesla isn’t the only player in town now and they haven’t been aggressive in putting new products out,” said Stephanie Valdez Streaty, director of industry insights at Cox Automotive.

“Elon is Tesla: his persona definitely has an impact upon the perception of the brand, and he has been polarizing. I don’t think we’ve seen any impacts in sales because of this – yet. I do think this will happen, but it remains to be seen which consumers he attracts and which he loses.”

Another uncertainty is how Tesla will be affected by policies pursued by Trump. The incoming president has called the shift to electric cars “lunacy”, said that supporters of such vehicles should “rot in hell” and vowed to strip away incentives to purchase them. Trump has somewhat tempered his invective against electric vehicles following Musk’s endorsement but is still planning to remove a key tax credit for new buyers.

For now, though, there is a windfall for those selling anti-Musk merchandise. “I feel like people really wanted to make their voices heard in some way, even as passive as it is,” said Stacey Davis, who started selling Musk bumper stickers a year ago. Davis, who has a Tesla, said she has had an 800% increase in sales of these bumper stickers on Etsy since the election.

“Elon started not aligning with what I believe in and he just started being really weird, extra,” said Davis. “At first we’re like, OK, he’s just one of those eccentric types of people. But then when he went into his political stuff and I was like, oh no, this is not it.”

With a Trump presidency looming over the US for the next four years, Musk’s involvement is a bittersweet prospect for some sellers. “I’d be happy

for him to disappear from public discourse and just be another rich guy," Hiller said. "If I never sell another Elon sticker that's fine. I'd rather him just be gone for the country's sake and I can go back to making stickers of fish."