

# Tesla not alone with cars that nearly drive themselves

By DEE-ANN DUBOIN AND

TOM KORNBLUM

Associated Press

DETROIT — With all the attention paid to Tesla Motors' Autopilot system, you'd think the company was the only one making cars that can almost drive themselves. But many automakers have rolled out cars that do what Teslas do.

The difference: Tesla debuted Autopilot, a suite of semi-autonomous driving features, with a swifter, while others tread more carefully.

Tesla's Autopilot allows the car to maintain a set speed, brake automatically and stay centered in its lane. Most luxury vehicles — and even some mainstream ones like the Honda Civic — can do the same. When Tesla upped the ante by offering automatic lane-changing, Mercedes-Benz quickly matched that.

"I don't think Tesla is way ahead in terms of the technology. They view themselves as a technology company, so they're going to push it," said Adrian Lund, president of the Insurance Institute for High-

way Safety, an insurer-funded group.

Pushing it is important. Automakers are feeling pressure to make sure tech firms like Google and Apple don't leapfrog them with driverless cars of their own.

They also see dollar signs: Ford CEO Mark Fields said car companies currently make \$2.3 trillion in revenue each year. The global transportation business, including buses and car sharing, is worth \$5.4 trillion per year. Carmakers that develop autonomous taxis or ride-sharing services could get a big slice of that pie.

But if they aren't cautious enough, and driverless cars are deemed unsafe by consumers or regulators, a potentially life-saving technology might not make it to market. Critics have accused Tesla of pushing too far too fast following a crash in Florida that killed the driver of a Model S with Autopilot engaged.

Mercedes-Benz recently pulled an ad, titled "The Future," after Consumer Reports said it implied that the 2017 E-Class sedan is capable of self-driving. The fine

print for the ad says the car can't drive itself, but Mercedes said it didn't want to confuse drivers.

General Motors delayed the introduction of its Tesla-like Super Cruise system because of safety concerns.

"They don't deploy it, because they know that things can fail," said Raj Rajkumar, a computer engineering professor at Carnegie Mellon University who leads its autonomous vehicle research.

Automakers have been slowly adding driver-assist features to their vehicles for years in an effort to make occupants safer and meet U.S. and European government mandates. Mercedes introduced adaptive cruise control, which automatically maintains a distance from cars in front, in 1999, four years before Tesla was founded. Ford introduced automatic parallel parking in 2009, six years before Tesla did.

The push toward autonomy intensified in 2011 when Google announced plans to develop fully self-driving cars by 2020.

# CARS

Continued from Page 6B

For the most part, traditional automakers modestly tout semiautonomous driving features as safety options. They don't claim, as Tesla CEO Elon Musk does, that the cars can drive better than humans. An ad for the Infiniti Q50 sedan, for example, shows a driver thinking about projects and deadlines as his car looks out for hazards.

"Its instinct to protect leaves you free to drive," the narrator says.

Lund said traditional automakers also tend to make it more difficult — and expensive — to get semiautonomous functions than Tesla does.

Tesla's Autopilot comes as a separate \$2,500 software update on the Model S sedan, which starts at \$66,000. Mercedes charges \$1,250 for a package of semiautonomous features on the 2017 E-Class that also includes keyless entry, satellite radio and cabin air

**"When used correctly, it is already significantly safer than a person driving by themselves."**

*Tesla founder Elon Musk, in a blog post, about Autopilot*

filtration. The E-Class starts at \$52,150.

Consumers must also play a name game when hunting for advanced driving features. Volvo's semiautonomous system is called Pilot Assist, while BMW's is Driving Assistant Plus and Subaru's is EyeSight.

"When people go shopping, they don't even know what to ask for," Lund said. Making semiautonomous features standard and using fewer trade names would help, he said. Consumer Reports

called for Tesla to drop the Autopilot name and do more to ensure drivers remain engaged while the system is in use. But Musk said Tesla is sticking to Autopilot — the name and technology.

"When used correctly, it is already significantly safer than a person driving by themselves," he wrote in a recent blog post.

Some say tech-minded companies like Tesla deserve credit for prodding the traditional auto industry toward a driverless future. Fully driverless cars that communicate with one another could potentially save thousands of lives per year, advocates say. More than 30,000 people die in crashes each year in the U.S. alone.

"In the world of Silicon Valley, if it's not done yesterday, it's late," said Mark Peters, an airline pilot from Hurst, Texas, who traded in an older Tesla for a newer one so he could get Autopilot. "They are willing to take that risk that scares the daylight out of other companies."