

TESLA MODEL S P90D

Tim Barnes-Clay gets charged up as he tests the all-electric Tesla

When I first saw the all-electric Tesla Model S I thought it looked all right. Don't get me wrong, it's a good looker, but nothing that different from a large BMW, Jaguar or a Maserati. I guess I was expecting to step back in amazement exclaiming "wow", or something similar.

I don't tend to do that very often with any car these days. It could be me being all middle aged and cynical, or it could be that motor manufacturers just aren't producing 'wow-factor' cars anymore – in terms of looks anyway.

Sure, there are some awesome Ferraris and some beautiful Aston Martins and Maseratis about, but there's nothing about them that hasn't been seen before. There are only so many ferociously-tuned Ferraris and gentlemen's Astons and Maseratis you can look at before they start morphing into pieces of machinery with a price-tag hopelessly out of reach for the vast majority.





The Tesla isn't so different – with the Model S P90D costing £87,300 in basic form – or £115,980 (£4,500 government green car grant included) once the bells and whistles are included. My test car was the latter price, with options such as smart air suspension, premium interior and lighting, ultra-high fidelity sound and the 'ludicrous' speed upgrade added. And before you wonder – it's not me saying the speed upgrade is ludicrous, that's actually the name Tesla has given to it. More on that later.

But, the 'majority' isn't what cars like the Model S and the brands I mentioned are about. These rides are different because most people aren't able to afford them. In other words, you feel special driving cars like the Tesla. Yes, folks, it's all about good old fashioned human emotions.

Interestingly, though, the Tesla Model S feels strangely emotionless inside. Basically, it consists of a 17 inch iPad-like touchscreen – where you control most things – with seats and a steering wheel, all surrounded by minimalistic luxury. But once settled, and with seat belt fastened (this takes longer than it should due to the car's recessed seatbelt buckle), it couldn't be any more uncomplicated to drive the Model S. There is no key to turn or starter button because gadgetry within the car detects when you're there. There's no handbrake either, so all that's left to do is move the steering column mounted gear selector into 'D' for drive and move off in peace and quiet.

With a dab of the right foot, the Tesla replies instantaneously. The four-wheel drive P90D has oodles of grip, so there's no fish-tailing. Switch to the aforementioned 'ludicrous' mode by using the massive touchscreen, and acceleration is bonkers. Zero to 60mph only takes 2.8 seconds. The rest of the time 0-60mph is achieved in 4.2 seconds and the car's top speed is 155mph. Yet, while the rapidity will make you grin ear to ear, any enthusiastic motoring will devour the car's electric range. With a full charge, the flagship P90D will manage more than 300 miles, but on-screen energy flow information is always there to show you how much further the all-electric car will travel.

The Model S munches mind-numbing motorway miles effortlessly and the driving position is decent, but the broad car is awkward to position on narrower roads. The steering has a shortage of feel and, on the twisty bits, the weighty electric vehicle seems anaesthetised, responding languidly.

However, the majority of the Tesla's weight, including its big battery, is low, so the car does feel very planted. And with loads of regenerative braking, the Model S will slow down rapidly just by lifting off the accelerator pedal. The actual brakes are bob-on, too – certainly feeling as sharp as any big BMW or Maserati.

Charging the car up is the biggest headache. It's not hard to do, it's just that Tesla's free Supercharge points are sprinkled around the country, so they're not always convenient to access. When you do find them, they are pretty splendid, though, charging the Model S from flat to half juiced-up in under 30 minutes.

Instead, the domestic plug-equipped cable that comes with the car provides six miles of charge per hour. Or a blue three-pin utility plug cable, also standard kit, can be used, giving 22 miles of electrical energy every hour. If you're serious about buying a Tesla, and there's no reason not to be, installing a wall box with the blue utility socket is the way to go. Fully charging a Model S from a normal mains plug will take over a day.

The Tesla Model S is many things – it's a 'green' car, it's a luxury sports machine, and it's a family vehicle. Indeed, there's lots of legroom, and, as I discovered, you can fit three child seats into the rear. Handy for my nine, six and two-year old kids. There's even the option of additional rear-facing child seats in the generous rear boot. The load space in the front of the car, where most vehicle's house their engine, is also useful for shopping bags.

All in all, the Tesla Model S, with its mind-bending performance, accommodating ride and hushed-running elegance make it a truly rewarding car. I guarantee you'll always feel special driving it.

