Engineer Deaths Won't Stop Tesla's Model S Plans

Frank Jordans, Associated Press Writer

GENEVA (AP) — The death of three Tesla engineers in a plane crash last month was a heavy blow for the tight-knit Californian electric car maker, but it is holding onto its plan of producing and selling the new Model S within three years, its chief designer said Wednesday at the Geneva Motor Show.

"The plane crash was hard to absorb," Franz von Holzhausen told The Associated Press. "We have to all rally and pick up the slack."

Doug Bourn, a senior electrical engineer; Andrew Ingram, an electrical engineer; and Brian Finn, a senior interactive electronics manager, died when their Cessna struck power lines in fog near Tesla's East Palo Alto headquarters Feb. 17.

Von Holzhausen said Tesla was already scouring the auto and aerospace industry for talent to meet its ambitious schedule of rolling out its second all-electric model before the end of 2012.

The fledgling automaker hopes the Model S will win over environmentally conscious consumers for whom its only current offering, the Tesla Roadster, remains out of reach.

The mid-sized sedan will retail for about $49,000 in the United States, significantly less than the $109,000 Tesla is asking for the high-end Roadster, which will cease production around the time the new model comes to market.

The Model S "is really what's going to cement the Tesla brand in the market place," Von Holzhausen said.

Any customer who orders a Roadster now is guaranteed to still get one though, he added. So far, Tesla has sold about 1,000 of its electric sports cars in 21 countries. The Roadster has a top speed of 125 mph (201 kph) and a range of 244 miles (393 kilometers). Von Holzhausen said by the time the Model S comes to market battery technology will have significantly extended the distance that car can travel on a single charge.

The company is pushing its vehicles out through ten dedicated showrooms in the United States and Europe, and will open at least four more in Milan, Zurich, Copenhagen and Paris this year.

There are also plans to expand to Asia, with a right-hand-drive Roadster destined for Japan, Australia and Hong Kong later this year.

Cristiano Carlutti, Vice-President Europe, said he was confident the small company of just 500 employees can hold its own against more established automakers. Tesla has already entered into a partnership with German auto giant Daimler to produce batteries for the company's electric Smart car range.

Daimler CEO Dieter Zetsche told reporters earlier this week it was "possible or even likely" his company would maintain its nearly 10 percent stake in Tesla if the California startup goes through with its plans to sell stock to the public.

Tesla declined to comment on the IPO in Geneva, citing a mandatory "quiet period" following its January filing with the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

The company instead displayed a one-off special edition of the Roadster designed in cooperation with Swiss watchmaker TAG Heuer. The two companies will announce further joint ventures at a watch and jewelry fair in Basel, Switzerland, later this month.

Source URL (retrieved on *04/25/2015 - 12:22am*):
http://www.impomag.com/news/2010/03/engineer-deaths-wont-stop-teslas-model-s-plans?qt-recent_content=1