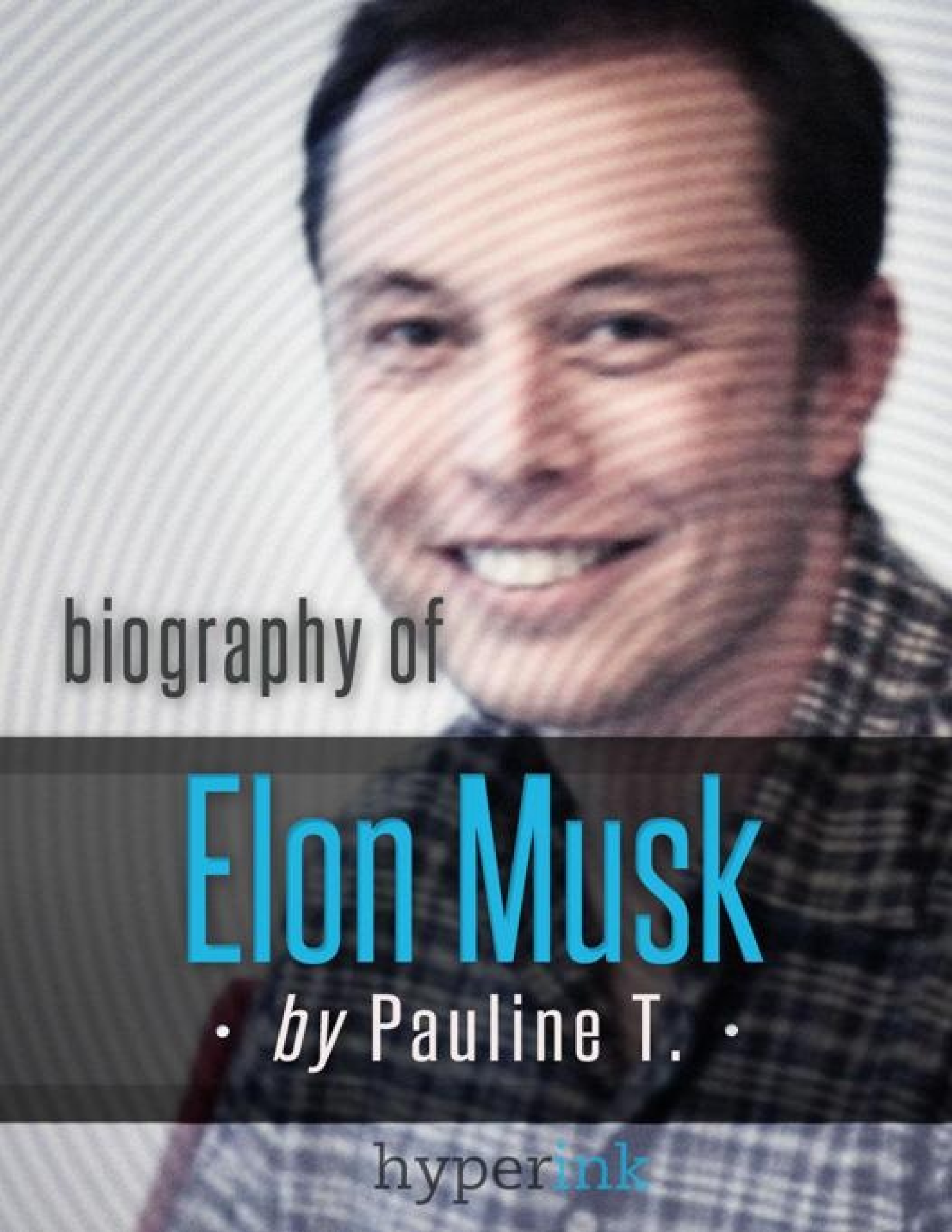


A close-up portrait of Elon Musk, smiling and looking slightly to the right. He has short, dark hair and is wearing a dark, patterned jacket over a light-colored shirt. The background is a light, textured surface.

biography of

Elon Musk

• *by* Pauline T. •

hyperink

Biography Of Elon Musk

Introduction

Elon Musk is primarily known for the part he played in founding the widely known electronic money transfer site [Paypal.com](https://www.paypal.com). Though the company been the subject of several controversies, it remains the most trusted medium for Internet commerce. These days, Musk applies the same imagination and ability to innovate that he used to make PayPal a success to his leadership of Tesla Motors, of which he is presently chairman. The small automobile manufacturer appears to be on the brink of major breakthroughs the industry, seeking to create usable, practical electric cars that can truly compete with gasoline-powered vehicles. Musk, an engineer, has played an integral part in the development of the company's flagship vehicle, the Tesla Roadster.



Image via [Brian Solis](#).

Musk is not limiting his creative capacities to online finance and battery-powered automobiles, however. He has his eye set on a goal even larger than the worlds of money and oil; namely, space. He is the chief executive officer and

chief technology officer of Space Exploration Technologies Corporation, a company many refer to simply as SpaceX, which won the contract to design the replacement for the NASA space shuttle. It is the larger goal of both companies to address the matter of climate change.

Elon Musk's Childhood

Musk was born in the South African City of Pretoria during the apartheid era. Musk has attributed his personal drive to his maternal grandfather, an explorer who moved to South Africa from Canada, and to the general culture of South Africa itself, which he has described as "entrepreneurial."

His family was moderately wealthy, though nowhere near as wealthy as Musk is now. Musk's father, Errol, was an electrical and mechanical engineer, and his mother, Maye, a dieticien and model. The two divorced when Musk was nine years old. Musk was physically small and considerably smarter than other children his age, and bullying was a major issue in his childhood. The stereotypical "nerd," Musk was not only a bookworm, but taught himself to program at age ten, making his first sale, a video game he had written called Blaster, to a magazine at 12. He sold the game for \$500.

Musk has two siblings, a brother and a sister. His brother, Kimbal, joined him as partner in his first successful venture, Zip2. Kimbal Musk would go on to be head of his own startup, a social search engine called Oneriot, and also chef and owner of a restaurant in Colorado called The Kitchen. Musk's sister, Tosca, is a film producer with over a dozen films under her belt.

In various interviews, Musk has described himself as using literature, and later, computer programming, as escape mechanisms during his childhood. Musk's favorite authors as a child included Jules Verne, Robert Heinlein, and J.R.R. Tolkien. His interest in computers developed on its own, seemingly without any encouragement from his engineer father, who told him that computers were toys that would never amount to anything. After the divorce of his parents, young

Elon Musk was moved around to different schools, seven in total, and never had a chance to truly make friends. Dreams about moving to America were also in his head from a young age. He saw it as a refuge, a new frontier where smart and the innovative people like himself went to follow their dreams.

Leaving South Africa

At age 17, Musk graduated from the Pretoria Boys High School, and rather than do service in the South African Defense Force, he decided on a move to Canada, where his maternal relatives lived. He did this on his own, without the support of his parents. He has stated that he chose to move in part because he did not want to participate in the oppression of the country's mostly-black population.

Musk enrolled at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, where he studied business and physics. He earned money working on the farm of a cousin, cleaning out sawmill boilers. He later transferred to the University of Pennsylvania, then moved to California with the intention of studying physics at Stanford. Fate had something else in store for him, however; he decided to drop out of school and form a company called Zip2.

The Zip2 Era

Zip2 was started in 1995, at the beginning of the dotcom bubble, prior to there being any evidence of the billions of dollars that Internet startups would make in the coming years. Zip2's model was to provide content and merchant solutions for Internet companies such as one early client, *The New York Times*. The intention was to expand the hosting and e-commerce services to include local merchants, to help them to sell their products locally.

Zip2 functioned as a host and developer of websites and was focused on

developing the fledgling concept of commerce via the Internet. From the company's inception to the point at which it was sold, Musk was again on a tight budget, running Zip2 out of the apartment in Palo Alto that he and his brother shared. The company was bought by Compaq in 1999 for \$300 million, cash.

X.com Turns Into Paypal

Musk next ventured into the world of online payments, sensing an opportunity there. Within weeks of selling Zip2, Musk started X.com, which quickly absorbed and took on the name of a rival payment company called Paypal. The new company made dramatic changes to the way commerce was handled, both online and for financial transactions outside of the Internet. It came to be viewed as a viable payment option as practical as paying with cash and credit cards. The revolutionary concept came to be a pillar of online commerce.

In its early days, Paypal was the epitome of the free-wheeling, youthful and relaxed atmosphere that would come to associated with dotcom startups of the era. Paypal.com drew talented people who went on to create, or help create, other significant online entities, such as Youtube and Facebook. As a result of Paypal's incredible success, Elon Musk became a billionaire.

Tesla Motor Company

After selling Paypal, Musk moved to further his dream of reducing emissions and creating a cleaner environment. He invested a little over six million dollars in Tesla Motors. The company's plan was simple: it sought to develop a flagship electric vehicle that could hold its own against established automobile icons like Ferrari, then to create a line of luxury cars to compete with the likes of Mercedes-Benz and Toyota's Lexus line, followed by affordable, electric cars that would be mass produced. The company has since expanded its goal to

include releasing an SUV after the debut of its luxury sedan.

The flagship vehicle, the Roadster, is intended to prove the viability of the electric car both to the public and to potential investors. The Roadster is a high performance, all-electric, two-seater sports car. The company later intends to market the somewhat more affordable all-electric luxury sedan called the Model S. In addition to making its own line of electric vehicles, Tesla also supplies batteries to major auto companies for use in their electric and hybrid cars. For the moment, the sale of these batteries is Tesla Motors' main source of income. Musk has said that he intends Tesla to become a fully independent auto manufacturer that specializes in [zero emissions](#) all electric vehicles. His goal is to make a major difference in the world's consumption of oil. As the Roadster's Product Architect, prior to becoming CEO, Musk won a [Global Green Award](#) that was presented to him by Mikhail Gorbachev.

The Tesla Model S is expected to ship in June of 2012, and analysts have stated the future of the company hinges specifically on how well these do in the marketplace. Tesla shares have declined in value in early February, but this was expected; investors were warned as early as 2010 that just prior to the release of the Model S, Tesla Motors' revenues would decline. Still, this has led to heavy criticism of Elon Musk's leadership abilities. Musk has said that reports of the company's financial issues are exaggerated, and that the company is in position to produce both the Model S and the upcoming Model X Crossover SUV.

SpaceX

One of Musk's concerns with the shuttle era of space travel is the fact that the launch vehicles are not reusable. His fourth company, SpaceX ,has created reusable launch vehicles that are also much less costly to operate than those used

with the Space Shuttle. Musk's intent has been to streamline the process of building the vehicles by eliminating the layers of waste present in the space program up until recently. The two launch vehicles, called Falcon 1 and Falcon 9, are designed to lift heavy objects into orbit. In addition to the launch vehicles, SpaceX is also developing a type of spacecraft that will be taken into orbit by the Falcon launch vehicles. SpaceX has been awarded a contract by NASA to develop vehicles for taking cargo to the International Space Station.</p>

Musk's Scandals And Controversies



Image via [Farm6](#).

In 2008, there was speculation that Tesla Motors would be sued for breach of contract by clients who had paid money to the company as deposits for the Tesla vehicles. As a result of leaks to the media by employee Peter Zhou, Musk was forced to admit that Tesla Motors had almost no money. After the leaks were made, Musk embarked on a witch-hunt to find the employee who leaked the information, bringing in an IT expert to trace the source of the emails. Musk told Zhou he could resign or be prosecuted, and Zhou opted to resign.

After the scandal regarding his company's finances, Musk next had to deal with Martin Eberhard, Tesla's former CEO, who sued to be listed as a founder of

Tesla Motors. He claimed that Musk was attempting to rewrite history by eliminating his role in the company's initial development. Eberhard also claimed that Musk was attempting to take credit for his contribution to the company.

Musk's [response](#) was that the work that Eberhard had done for Tesla had been redone since he left. The suit was settled, but the terms have been kept private.

Elon Musk's Personal Life

Musk met his first wife, [Justine Wilson](#), while at Queenstown College in Canada, just after leaving South Africa to come to North America. Wilson a published fantasy novelist from Ontario, Canada. Together they have five sons. After their divorce in 2010, a filing from the settlement was circulated. In the filing, Musk stated that he was "broke" and living on loans from associates. The news caused a stir among Musk's critics, who speculated that since Musk could not manage his own money, he was probably not suited to run a multibillion-dollar car company. Like many venture capitalists, Musk's 1.9 billion dollar net worth was mostly tied up in his various ventures, including SpaceX, in which he says he placed his last \$35 million. In a challenge to their post-nuptial agreement, Justine Musk's demands were that she get \$6 million, as well as shares in both Tesla and SpaceX.

Elon Musk's second wife is 14 years younger than he is and has appeared in several films, including *Pride and Prejudice* and *Inception* with Leonardo DiCaprio. Musk is reported to have proposed marriage to Riley within a couple of weeks of his separation from his first wife. He had met the actress, who was then 23, at a nightclub in London. The relationship lasted five years, though the two were only married for one of those. Riley filed divorce papers in January 2012. The impending divorce from Riley was announced to the world by Elon Musk via Twitter. He has stated that he has no plans to enter into a third marriage anytime soon, saying that such a decision would be "unwise."

Much of Musk's life is consumed by running his companies and traveling, although he has said in interviews that he takes no vacations. He does, however,

find time to play with his children. Musk has a set of eight year-old twins, Griffin and Xavier, and a set of four year-old triplets, Kai, Saxon, and Damian. Musk goes to Disneyland often with them and has said that after visiting the amusement park about 10 times, he is getting tired of it. He sees his sons every weekend.

Elon Musk is an avid collector of cars, as evidenced by his ownership of a Porsche 911 and a 1967 Jaguar Series 1, as well as his former ownership of a McLaren F1, which he purchased for a million dollars and later resold for \$1.5 million.

As Robert Downey's main influence in developing the Tony Stark character for the Iron Man movies, Musk was given a cameo part in *Iron Man 2*. The Tesla Motors Palo Alto factory was used for much of the filming. This small appearance was not the limit of Musk's relationship with the film industry, either. He is listed as executive producer for *Thank You for Smoking*, a movie made by former Paypal employee, David O. Sacks.

Elon Musk In The News

Among the most recent news regarding Elon Musk is the [Businessweek](#) story that losses have been mounting for his Tesla Motors. As sales of the Roadster wind down, Musk's company is said to now have lost more than 81 million dollars.

[Bloomberg](#) is reporting that Musk's Solar Panel Company, SolarCity, is said to be preparing an initial public offering. Analysts believe that it is possible that the company may file with the SEC as early as March. The offering would once again make Musk, who lost much of his cash fortune supporting his other two ventures, a billionaire. Meanwhile, [USA Today](#) is asking the question, "Will Elon Musk's split from Talulah Riley harm Tesla?" The article queries whether or not the divorce will have an impact on the fledgling motor company.

According to the business blog [Fast Company](#), Musk and Facebook backer Peter Thiel, who was also a former employee of Musk's at Paypal, are collaborating on yet another startup, this one is called Stripe. It is to be another payment option, competing with PayPal. With those names behind it, many analysts already see it as promising.

Musk's [SpaceX](#) will also be making an initial public offering in 2013. The company appears set to dominate the field of private space exploration already acquiring several contracts to deliver satellites into space.

Elon Musk Quotes

"I had a terrible upbringing. I had a lot of adversity growing up. One thing I worry about with my kids is they don't face enough adversity."

– Musk, stated at an awards ceremony hosted by one of his companies.

"Relative to others with a similar net worth, I don't spend much money on personal matters. I own no homes (not even my residence at this point), yachts, or expensive artwork. My clothes are mostly jeans and T-shirts and I almost never take vacations, apart from kid-related travel."

– Musk. in an Interview with *Maclean's Magazine*.

"I don't think there's a penis-measuring contest going on. Amusing as that may be. That would be hilarious, actually. Our competitors are not Paul Allen and Branson, but Boeing, Lockheed, and the big aerospace companies."

– Musk, in response to the question, "It's become a trend among billionaires, like Paul Allen and Richard Branson, to dabble in space exploration. Is it just a penis-measuring contest?" It was asked during an interview with The Daily Beast website.

"We're entering the era of commercial space flight, which will advance dramatically faster than in the past. But I made the decision to patent almost nothing: Our competition is the Chinese and Russian governments, against whom patents are unenforceable and can simply be used as a recipe. It's much better for our technology to be trade secrets. I'd rather keep the information to myself."

– Musk, in an interview with Diane Brody for *Bloomberg Businessweek*.

"Given the choice, I'd rather stick a fork in my hand than write about my personal life. Unfortunately, it seems that I don't have any other option. Several awful things have been widely reported that are simply false, but a falsehood uncorrected may as well be truth."

– Published in the *Huffington Post* in early 2012, in response to gossip about Musk's divorce from actress Talulah Riley.

Elon Musk Trivia

- In addition to his stake in Tesla, Elon Musk owns SolarCity, the largest distributor of solar panels in the United States. This company, too, is a part of Musk's vision for helping humanity by reducing the usage of oil.
- Musk chose to attend Queenstown college rather than Waterloo due to the fact that there were more girls at the former university than at the latter.</p>
- Musk regularly works 100-hour weeks and travels between his companies via a private jet.
- Musk allegedly told his first wife, Justine, that he would be seeking a divorce by leaving a message with her therapist.
- Musk earned undergraduate degrees in both Physics and Business during his time at the University of Pennsylvania.
- His intention when leaving Pennsylvania for Stanford was to get a PhD in Business and Physics, but he left to start Zip2 after two days.
- Musk's stake in Tesla reportedly has a value of over a billion dollars.
- Musk believes that there will be a dramatic shift towards consumers driving more electric cars over the next two decades.
- Musk designed the Tesla Roadster's carbon-fiber body.
- Musk's knowledge of how to design and build rockets, which he does with his company, SpaceX, is entirely self-taught.

Musk Going Forward

Musk may be low on cash now, as a result of his investments, but in the startup world, cash poor does not necessarily mean poor overall. Musk may be borrowing money from friends now, but could easily be among the richest men in the world should Tesla, SpaceX and SolarCity prove themselves viable over the next few months. Even if all three do not work out, Musk should still land on his feet with one of the several other projects he has in the pipeline.

Musk is constantly learning and applying what he learned in the last venture to the next. He has repeatedly shown that once he has decided to accomplish a goal he has the work-ethic and the drive to follow it up. Musk has something other people with drive and ambition lack: the ability to summon hundred of millions in venture capital to back his projects. Rarely in history has one individual come along who can make the right moves and choose the right projects consistently. Musk has become so reliable that his name being associated with a project can instantly make it seem workable. He is still in his forties, and could easily build a legacy akin to that of Thomas Edison or Henry Ford over the coming decades.

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