

Past JETRO Client

Tesla Motors prepared its first shipment of Roadsters for Japan

On April 21, 2010, Tesla Motors prepared its first shipment of Roadsters for Japan. This first group included a dozen Japan Signature Series Roadster Sports, made especially for the company's first customers there. While all Roadsters to be sold in Japan will have homologation modifications--such as changes to meet safety and lighting standards and resized license plate boxes--this first dozen also have commemorative badging, unique nomenclature, and a letter from company CEO, Elon Musk.



“Japan’s a great market for us,” said Ricardo Reyes, vice president of communications at Tesla Motors. “It combines the very best of automotive enthusiasm with an interest for innovation and high-tech....It seems every time we mentioned Asia and every time we talked about Roadster in new markets, Japan would always come up, and that’s why we chose Japan as our entry point into the Asian market.” The company is currently looking at possible site locations for a store in Tokyo, he said.

Mr. Reyes also described Tesla Motors’ partnership with Panasonic. “We have the most advanced Lithium-ion testing labs in the world,” he said. “What we’ve decided to do for the first time ever is to share a lot of that information with Panasonic, a great partner of ours, so that they can build Lithium-ion cells that are specific for our cars [and] for EVs in general.” On Thursday, Panasonic Energy Company President Naoto Noguchi presented Tesla Chief Technology Officer JB Straubel with the first production Lithium-ion cells manufactured at a new facility in Suminoe, Japan, states a company press release. The facility will produce more than 300 million cells per year.

Due to Tesla Motors’ recent S-1 filing, Mr. Reyes did not give any projections of Roadster sales in Japan but shared the price of one: 18.1 million yen (or US\$192,5731). The Roadsters are hand-built, made of carbon fiber, can travel more than 236 miles (or 380km) on one charge--which is about four hours worth of driving at 60mph-- can accelerate from zero to 60mph (or 100km) in 3.7 seconds, do not require regular oil changes or exhaust system work, and have no spark plugs, pistons, hoses, belts or clutches to replace, states a company press release.

“It’s important to note that the Roadster is still the only all-electric vehicle [that is] highway approved in the U.S. and internationally on the roads today,” said Franz von Holzhausen, senior design executive

at Tesla Motors. Mr. von Holzhausen was hired to the company two years ago to, among other responsibilities, “take this amazing product and actually make it better,” he said. “One of the ways we’ve done that is by listening to the consumer voice....We actually hope to continue to hear the customer voice even from Japan, and bring those elements back into the Roadster.”

Interestingly, all 12 Roadster Sports of the first shipment are left-hand drive. That is a result of the high demand for left-hand Roadsters in Japan, said Mr. Reyes. Each Roadster Sport is also equipped with the Japanese signature package, which includes a mobile charger, home charger and office charger.

When asked if the company plans to sell the Model S in Japan if the Roadster proves successful, Mr. Reyes said, “We use the Roadster to show that the electric car is not only possible, but it’s something that’s desirable, that can compete with the very best in its class....We’re going to use the Model S to show that we can get it in the hands of more and more people.”

When asked about the sentiments of other automakers in Japan, as well as other high-line car manufacturers from other countries, about Tesla’s entry into the Japanese market, Mr. Reyes said, “It’s been very heartening to see the bigger car companies commit to this. Like I said, our ultimate goal is to get more and more electric vehicles into the hands of the masses. We don’t expect to do that alone. To use an American phrase, we’ve been in the electric pool for a long time, asking people to jump in, and they’re starting to do it and that’s great. We’re happy to see them commit. So hopefully they’ve taken it and said, ‘If that little car company can do it, we can do it as well.’”

[Tesla Motors Japan webpage](#)

Japan Company Profile

Japan Company: Tesla Motors Japan

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