24 Weird Things We've Learned About Elon Musk

Elon Musk has always been a thinker and a creator. As a child, he daydreamed in an almost trance-like manner and coded his own video games. He always found resourceful ways to make money, and after he graduated from college, he opted for entrepreneurship rather than wait for an internet company to take notice of him.

Numerous passions inspired Musk, and today he manages companies and projects that specialize in electric and self-driving cars, private space exploration and Mars colonization, solar energy and artificial intelligence.

On top of his executive roles with Tesla, SpaceX, SolarCity and OpenAI, Musk has time for fatherhood, Hollywood, playing video games and brainstorming even more big ideas. Below are 19 surprising facts and anecdotes about Musk that paint a picture of the eccentric multi-disciplinary engineer.

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1. His parents thought he might be deaf.

When Musk was a child, he would often gaze into the distance while his parents were speaking to him, which led them to believe that he might be hard of hearing. Doctors removed his adenoids, but it made no difference.

It turned out he was just daydreaming. His mother, Maye, told biographer Ashlee Vance, "He goes into his brain, and then you just see he is in another world. … Now I just leave him be because I know he is designing a new rocket or something."

2. He was violently bullied as a child.

Growing up in South Africa, Musk's classmates bullied him and beat him up badly. At age 41, he had surgery to fix a deviated septum.

> *Was beat up pretty badly as a kid & left me w jagged septum. Harder to breathe as I got older, so time to fix.*
>
> *— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) May 25, 2013*

During his recovery, he tweeted Tesla ideas while hopped up on painkillers.

> *Had a minor operation, so am in bed in meds. Probably shouldn't be tweeting :)*
>
> *— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) May 25, 2013*

> *Would love to do a pickup truck. Something w ultra low cg for sports car handling, dynamic air suspension & mega torque.*
>
> *— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) May 25, 2013*

3. He wrote and sold a video game in 1984.

It was called *Blastar*, and Musk, then 12, received $500 when its source code was published in the South African magazine *PC and Office Technology*. In 2015, a Google software engineer revised the code to function in HTML5 and made it playable. The objective of the game is to destroy an alien ship filled with weapons of mass destruction. While it's a rudimentary game, don't forget that it was created by a preteen nearly 33 years ago.

“[It was] a trivial game … but better than Flappy Bird,” Musk told *WaitButWhy*.

4. He paid his way through college by partying.

While studying at the University of Pennsylvania, the natural entrepreneur would throw house parties and charge a cover fee of $5 to help him pay his rent. He and his roommate were the only residents of a 10-bedroom frat house, and they would cover the windows with black trash bags and the walls with bright paint. Musk would stay sober during the events to keep things under control, as he was never big on drinking. Once, his mother Maye worked the door at one of the parties.

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5. He dropped out.

In 1995, Musk enrolled in graduate school at Stanford University to study physics. Within two days he decided that the internet had far greater promise to change society and left to found Zip2, a company that provided maps and directories to online newspapers.

6. He’s a father of five.

Musk has five sons with his ex-wife Justine Wilson. Twins Griffin and Xavier were born in 2004, and triplets Damian, Saxon and Kai were born in 2006. The couple also had a son named Nevada, born in 2002 and named after the location of Burning Man, the music and arts festival where he was conceived, though he died of sudden infant death syndrome at 10 weeks of age.

7. He’s the real-life Tony Stark.

Musk was the inspiration for Robert Downey, Jr.’s character, Tony Stark, in the *Iron Man* franchise. Downey received a tour of the SpaceX headquarters from Musk in 2007 and picked up on some of what he has described as “accessible eccentricities.” When the first *Iron Man* film was released, director Jon Favreau explained that Musk had inspired Downey’s interpretation of the character. Musk had a cameo in *Iron Man 2.*

8. He almost went broke.

Amid the Great Recession and an expensive divorce from his first wife, Wilson, who blogged about her demands on LiveJournal, Musk was living off loans from his wealthy friends. Musk put his last $35 million into Tesla and maintained his stake in the company, despite his lack of cash. Tesla went public, and today it’s valued at more than $33.4 billion, while Musk himself is worth $12.7 billion, according to *Forbes*.

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9. He owns one of James Bond’s cars.

In 2013, Musk spent $866,000 in an auction for the Lotus Esprit submarine car from the 007 film *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977). Through Tesla PR, Musk told *Jalopnik*, “It was amazing as a little kid in South Africa to watch James Bond in *The Spy Who Loved Me* drive his Lotus Esprit off a pier, press a button and have it transform into a submarine underwater. I was disappointed to learn that it can’t actually transform. What I’m going to do is upgrade it with a Tesla electric powertrain and try to make it transform for real.”

10. He once made a guest appearance on *The Big Bang Theory*.

In November 2015, Musk made a cameo on the CBS show in an episode called “The Platonic Permutation.” The scene, which takes place in a soup kitchen on Thanksgiving, features Musk washing dishes.

“I was on the turkey line, but I got demoted for being too generous with the gravy,” Musk says. Howard, a character on the show, is starstruck by Musk but manages to score his email address. The scene ends with the two sharing a slice of partially eaten pumpkin pie.

[embedded content]

11. He uses a tree analogy to describe how he learns so quickly.

Musk is knowledgeable about many disciplines, and many people wonder how is he able to educate himself so effectively. During a Reddit AMA in 2015, a user asked about his process.

Musk replied, “I do kinda feel like my head is full! My context switching penalty is high and my process isolation is not what it used to be. Frankly, though, I think most people can learn a lot more than they think they can. They sell themselves short without trying. One bit of advice: It is important to view knowledge as sort of a semantic tree — make sure you understand the fundamental principles, i.e. the trunk and big branches, before you get into the leaves/details or there is nothing for them to hang on to.”

12. He has an idea for a “fifth

mode of transport.”

Civilization has developed planes, trains, automobiles and boats, but Musk envisions his conceptual Hyperloop high-speed transit tube as a fifth mode. He says it is theoretically the fastest way to travel the California coast. It would never crash, it would be immune to weather and it would get passengers from Los Angeles to San Francisco in under 30 minutes. It would be energy efficient, maybe even self-powering with help from solar panels, which would keep costs well below an airline ticket, Musk told *PandoDaily* Editor-in-Chief Sarah Lacy in a recorded interview.

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13. He proposed nuking Mars.

During a Sept. 2015 appearance on *The Late Show With Stephen Colbert*, the host asked Musk to share his ideas regarding Mars colonization. “Eventually, you could transform Mars into an Earth-like planet,” Musk said. “You could warm it up.” When Colbert asked him to elaborate, Musk said, “There’s the fast way and the slow way. The fast way is drop thermonuclear weapons over the poles.” Later, he clarified that his idea would be to create two “suns” near Mars via nuclear fusion.

14. He wants to cover the world with space-based internet.

On Nov. 15, 2016, SpaceX filed for permission from the FCC to launch 4,425 satellites that would provide internet coverage around the world. Currently, a little more than 4,000 satellites (active and inactive combined) orbit the Earth.

15. His secret to success is staying clean.

When a Reddit user asked him, “What daily habit do you believe has the largest positive impact on your life?” Musk didn’t respond with one of the usual suspects – waking up early, expressing gratitude, meditating – but “showering.”

16. He bought $70 million worth of Bel Air mansions.

One Bel Air mansion wasn’t enough for the Tesla co-founder. Musk now owns five mansions in the lavish southern-California neighborhood, worth a total of more than $70 million. Of course, they are eco-friendly – an aerial image of Musk’s main home shows massive solar panels on one side of the property.

Over the years, Musk has amassed properties in the neighborhood. In 2012, he purchased one home for $17 million and in 2013, he bought a neighboring home – also next door to the late Gene Wilder – for nearly $7 million, which he turned into a private school for his six children. Since then, Musk purchased three additional Bel Air mansions.

17. He believes AI is humanity’s “biggest existential threat.”

Musk is incredibly leery of AI. In fact, he fears that AI could become more powerful than people and perhaps cause human extinction if it grows too smart.

In an interview with *Vanity Fair*, Musk explained that it’s technically not a robot that would become too powerful, but a computer algorithm. “The important thing is that if we do get some sort of runaway algorithm, then the human AI collective

can stop the runaway algorithm. But if there's large, centralized AI that decides, then there's no stopping it."

Musk isn't the only one to fear the power of AI. Other tech leaders and scientists are on the same page as the SpaceX founder, including Stephen Hawking and Bill Gates.

18. *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* was a "turning point" for Musk.

In an interview in the April 2017 issue of *Vanity Fai*r, Musk shared that Douglas Adams's *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* – a book about aliens destroying earth, creating supersonic highways and building a supercomputer that knows all of life's mysteries – was a "turning point" for him. In fact, the book had such an effect on Musk that he even slipped a reference to it into the Tesla Model S software.

19. He has a somewhat dirty sense of humor.

When it comes to humor, Musk has a surprisingly raunchy approach. When naming the Tesla Model 3, Musk originally wanted to call it the Model E "for dumb obvious humor reasons." If he'd had his way, the cars would be Models S, E and X. Unfortunately, due to a Ford trademark lawsuit, Musk had to settle for the Model 3 instead.

20. He used to drink 96 ounces of Diet Coke per day – plus some

coffee.

For a period in his life, Musk reportedly drank eight cans of Diet Coke in addition to several cups of coffee each day. It was his means of staying awake and focused during 100-hour work weeks during the process of building and launching his companies, he told *Inc*. in 2007.

"I got so freaking jacked that I seriously started to feel like I was losing my peripheral vision," he said.

It's unsafe for adults to consume more than 400 milligrams of caffeine per day, according to the Mayo Clinic. Musk's soda intake alone brought him up to 336 milligrams.

21. His mom is the face of CoverGirl — and an entrepreneur.

At the age of 69, Musk's mom, Maye, became the new face of beauty brand CoverGirl.

This isn't Maye's first modeling gig. She's been in the business since before Elon was born. She's appeared on the covers of international beauty magazines as well as in campaigns for Clinique and Revlon. Today, she's signed with modeling agency IMG Models Worldwide. She was also featured in Beyonce's music video for the 2013 song "Haunted."

Maye tweeted out the announcement of her partnership with the cosmetics company.

> *.@covergirl I'm so excited to say that I'm now officially a COVERGIRL, at 69! Beauty is for all ages. #COVERGIRLMADE pic.twitter.com/xndw5deHXs*
>
> *— Maye Musk (@mayemusk) September 27, 2017*

She also posted about it on Instagram, writing, “Who knew, after many years of admiring the gorgeous COVERGIRL models, that I would be one at 69 years of age? It just shows, never give up. Thank you COVERGIRL, for including me in your tribe of diversity. Beauty truly is for women of all ages, and I can’t wait to take you all along this amazing journey with me!”

Her son congratulated her via Twitter.

> *Congrats Mom! I love you.*
>
> *— Elon Musk (@elonmusk) September 28, 2017*

Entrepreneurship runs in the family: Aside from her modeling career, Maye is also a registered dietician-nutritionist and a wellness coach who has run her own nutrition business for more than 45 years. She was the first dietitian to be featured on a cereal box — specifically on 1 million boxes of Special K in Canada — according to her website.

22. He is always on the move.

In a recent earnings call, he said this of his working environment: “I always move my desk to wherever — I don’t really have a desk actually — I move myself to wherever the biggest problem is in Tesla. I really believe that one should lead from the front lines, and that’s why I’m here.

23. He spends a lot … on mansions.

Last year, Musk bought a home in Los Angeles — his fifth in the fancy neighborhood of Bel Air — for $24.25 million. Before that purchase, he apparently had already spent $48 million on other mansions, bringing the total spend to roughly $72 million.

24. He’s very passionate about his children’s education.

So much so that in 2015, Musk launched a private school for his family called Ad Astra. The name means “to the stars” in Latin, fitting for a guy who spends all his time thinking about space. He reportedly has run classes out of SpaceX’s Los Angeles office, and he has shared very few details about the undertaking, except for the fact that there are no traditional grades.

Additional reporting by Nina Zipkin

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