Cop arrests apparently sleeping Tesla driver going 93mph

Enlarge / Frankfurt, Germany – July 12, 2016: Tesla Model S luxury electric sedan.
typhoonski / Getty

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Police in Alberta, Canada, arrested a driver in July who was going 140km/h (87mph) in a Tesla Model S. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police announced the arrest yesterday.

The officer reported seeing “both front seats completely reclined and both occupants appearing to be asleep.” The car “appeared to be self-driving,” the RCMP says. When the officer turned on his emergency lights, the vehicle sped up to 150km/h (93mph).

Eventually, the RCMP pulled over the 20-year-old driver and charged him with speeding. They later added a dangerous driving charge.

The RCMP release doesn’t explain why the vehicle sped up after the officer activated emergency lights. We’re pretty sure Autopilot doesn’t have a “flee from police” function. It’s possible that the reclining driver wasn’t actually asleep and instead was conducting some kind of prank—if so, it certainly seems like a dangerous one.

A number of videos of Tesla drivers apparently falling asleep at the wheel have circulated over the last two years. This has sparked debate over whether the people in question had truly passed out or if the videos were staged.

It’s hard to be sure, but it seems likely to be a mix of both. In some cases, drivers have been pulled over by police heavily intoxicated. Those cases seem unlikely to be pranks given the significant criminal penalties involved. In other cases, we just have a video with no police involved—it’s certainly possible that these were staged.

The RCMP reminds the public that systems like Autopilot are “not self-driving systems. They still come with the responsibility of driving.”

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