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Sunday, April 8, 2018

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Tesla road trips to Mars

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Fans of Harry Potter's flying car adventures must have been thrilled to death Feb. 6, when Elon Musk's Tesla Roadster and its mannequin driver, Starman, were launched into space from SpaceX's Falcon Heavy rocket.

The Tesla is on an elliptical orbit around the sun that may take it a little beyond Mars at its furthest point. According to Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, the roadster will cross Mars' orbit in July.

Those interested can follow the Tesla's journey for themselves on whereisroadster.com, which was set up by Ben Pearson, founder of Old Ham Media.

Why launch a car and a mannequin into space? Space travel and space launches were once the territory of nations, but all things having to do with the heavens are being privatized, according to Newsweek.com. Until now, only very wealthy entrepreneurs could launch objects into space to promote their businesses, but the goal is to make it more cost effective for small business to take part in the commercial space race.

Launches are fun publicity stunts and sending the Tesla into space was a terrific advertising and social media opportunity. SpaceX was founded by Musk in 2002 to make and launch spacecraft. As Musk claimed, he launched a red car towards a red planet. Besides Starman, Musk's Tesla also contained Hot Wheels and other objects. With one launch, he captured the space community, members of international space treaties, his business colleagues, Mattel of Hot Wheels fame, Tesla, mannequin manufacturers, fans of the film *Starman*, NASA, and hosts of others. The theory behind this launch was partly getting more Big Bang for your buck!

Sending anything into space raises concerns over space debris and biohazards introduced into the universe.

Kevin Anderton of Forbes.com claims that there are some 20,000 objects over 10 centimeters orbiting in space, and millions of smaller objects. They could pose a danger to the International Space Station and various satellites.

There is no danger, however, of the roadster colliding with the International Space Station. It is heading towards Mars and will take at least a million years to get there. Earth is in no danger, either: The next time the Tesla will be close to Earth will be in 2091, and we might be able to see it then with a special telescope. After several million years, it has about an 11 percent chance of crashing to earth — sorry, Sci Fi horror fans.

Another concern is that the Tesla is carrying Earth bacteria that will pose a biothreat to space. Yet, Anderton and others theorize that the bacteria could only cause problems if the car collides with Mars. The threat is unlikely because it will get to Mars, if at all, in a million years. He sees the car with all the bacteria it carries, as a time capsule of life on 21st century Earth.