

Review: Elon Musk bet everything he had on Tesla

August 17 2021, by Jeff Rowe



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"Power Play: Tesla, Elon Musk, and the Bet of the Century," by Tim Higgins (Doubleday)

Space exploration, [solar power](#), [electric cars](#)—the fortune Elon Musk had made for his role in creating PayPal, the online payment system, gave him the money to plunge into those arenas. "Power Play: Tesla, Elon Musk, and the Bet of the Century" by Tim Higgins focuses on Tesla, the electric car concept that survived more near-death experiences than a Harrison Ford character.

In the author's telling, Musk emerges as the quintessential American entrepreneur—driven, intelligent, focused and confident in his own abilities, vision and judgements.

Except that Musk is South African by birth and upbringing, Canadian by immigration choice, finally arriving in the United States to attend the University of Pennsylvania and then, on to graduate studies at Stanford University.

But academic life couldn't match Musk's entrepreneurial fervor.

First, he was an investor in Tesla but every time he went to the bank for more money for the carmaker, he increased his control.

"Power Play" is a business thriller for real. Multiple times in the journey to launch the Tesla, the effort teeters on the edge of technological and financial cliffs. The Great Recession alone should have rolled over Tesla, but with the cool resolve of a fighter pilot, Musk steers the company to success.

Higgins explains Musk this way: "Belief created the vision, the vision would create the market, the market could create cash and cash would create cars." It didn't seem to hurt Tesla that Musk could be bitingly blunt, cranky and uncompromising.

Musk declined to cooperate with Higgins on this book, which is

unfortunate because Musk's name now clearly belongs with Carnegie, Ford and Jobs in the hall of great American entrepreneurs.

If only we knew what Musk was thinking, his [thought process](#) in forming and guiding his companies, his vision for setting and accomplishing goals and how he embraced and redefined California's entrepreneurial culture.

Higgins offers us the next-best thing, a clear, deeply reported and engaging account of how Musk launched a truly transformational car.

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