

# Tesla holds 'Giga Fest' at disputed German factory

October 9 2021, by Florian Cazerres

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Tesla is holding a "Giga Fest" to win over opponents of a controversial new factory near Berlin.

With a big wheel, music and an appearance by CEO Elon Musk, Tesla pulled out all the stops Saturday to win over opponents of the electric

carmaker's controversial new "gigafactory" near Berlin.

Thousands of people were brought in by special shuttle buses, with long queues forming at the Gruenheide site of the US electric vehicle maker's first European factory.

"I wanted to take a look. Tesla's a great, very innovative car manufacturer," said 25-year-old local resident Dominic, an engineer.

Construction at the plant had begun under an exceptional procedure granted by authorities two years ago, but opposition from locals over environmental concerns has held up final approval.

Demonstrators were already on the scene on Saturday morning, with a few people bearing signs like "Stop Tesla" and "water and forest aren't for private profit" gathered around 100 metres (yards) from the site.

"It's unbelievable that you can build a factory like this without permission," said 69-year-old local activist Gurdrun Luebeck.

Musk appeared at the "Giga-Fest" in the afternoon, and had to battle problems with the teleprompter to deliver a few sentences in German before continuing in English, stressing the company's green credentials.

"What this factory is about is to bring high volumes of affordable electric cars... to accelerate the transition to sustainable energy," he said to applause.

"We are ready to start production in a few months, basically November or December, and hopefully deliver our first cars in December," he added.

## **Environmental concerns**

Despite the local resistance, construction has been completed in double-quick time, replacing a swathe of pine forest with an enormous concrete-paved expanse accessed via "Tesla Road".



Despite local resistance, construction has been completed in double-quick time.

The company has laid on a big wheel, electronic music and vegetarian food trucks—an event conceived in the image of Berlin, Europe's party capital.

Tesla began construction at the site in Gruenheide in 2019 after receiving preliminary approval under a special procedure.

But local authorities are still in the process of evaluating the environmental impact of the factory, despite the construction being all but finished.

The special treatment afforded to the company has angered some residents, who are concerned about the impact the plant could have on the water supply and biodiversity.

Supported by NGOs, opponents have sent letters, held protests and gone to court to try and stop the project.

Last year, work at the Tesla site was temporarily stopped after NGOs requested an injunction to protect the nearby natural habitat of endangered species of lizards and snakes while they were in their winter slumber.

A residents' consultation, part of the approval process, is due to close on October 14.

Until the survey is completed, final approval cannot be given and production at the factory will not be allowed to begin.

Even then, the state environment ministry in Brandenburg, where the plant is located, told AFP "no date has been fixed" for this authorisation.

## **Economies of scale**

About 500,000 cars a year should roll off the line at the factory just outside Berlin, Tesla's first production location in Europe.



Tesla CEO Elon Musk will personally drop by at the "Giga Fest"

Not all the attendees at Saturday's party were convinced the region can take it.

"I'm sort of critical. There's not enough roads, not enough space for a factory like this here," said 35-year-old Marlen Winkler.

On the same 300-hectare plot, Musk also plans to build "the world's biggest battery factory".

And the site will equally boast the "world's largest die-casting machine", said Ferdinand Dudenhoeffer, director of the Center for Automotive

Research in Germany.

In the event that the factory is not approved, the carmaker will be compelled to dismantle the entire works at its own cost.

Such a turn of events is, however, "unlikely", said Dudenhoeffer, since the project has considerable "political support".

"Every political party is in favour," the car expert explained, while noting that changes to the factory facade could be requested by authorities, delaying the beginning of production further.

First planned for July 2021, the start has already been pushed back to the end of this year as a result of the company's administrative troubles.

Tesla was "irritated" by these setbacks, as it wrote in an open letter in March, in which the company called for a "reform" of Germany's planning procedures.

Despite the country's reputation for efficiency, major infrastructure projects are often slowed down by excess bureaucracy.

Berlin's new international airport opened in October 2020, eight years later than first planned, while the construction of a new train station in Stuttgart is not yet finished, having begun in 2010.

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