

I'm getting rid of my Tesla - Musk has gone too far

Sales are plummeting after a backlash against Musk's politics - and British owners are suffering with buyer's remorse

Emma Henderson

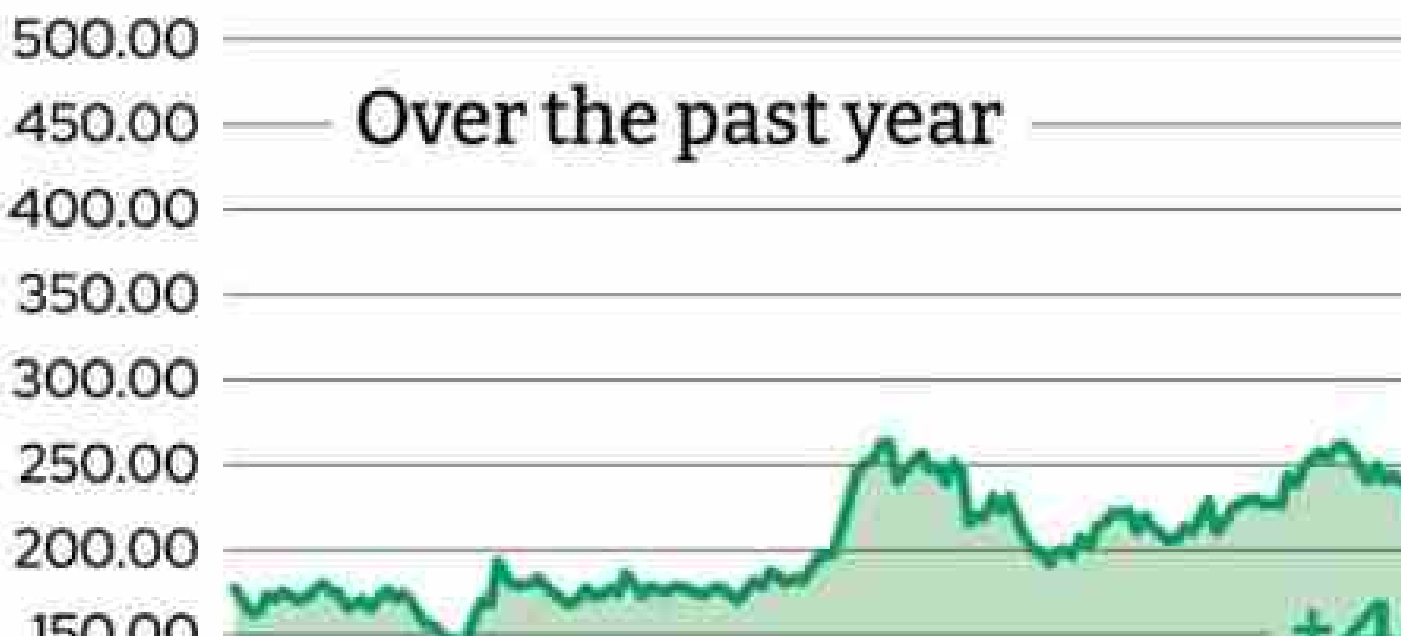
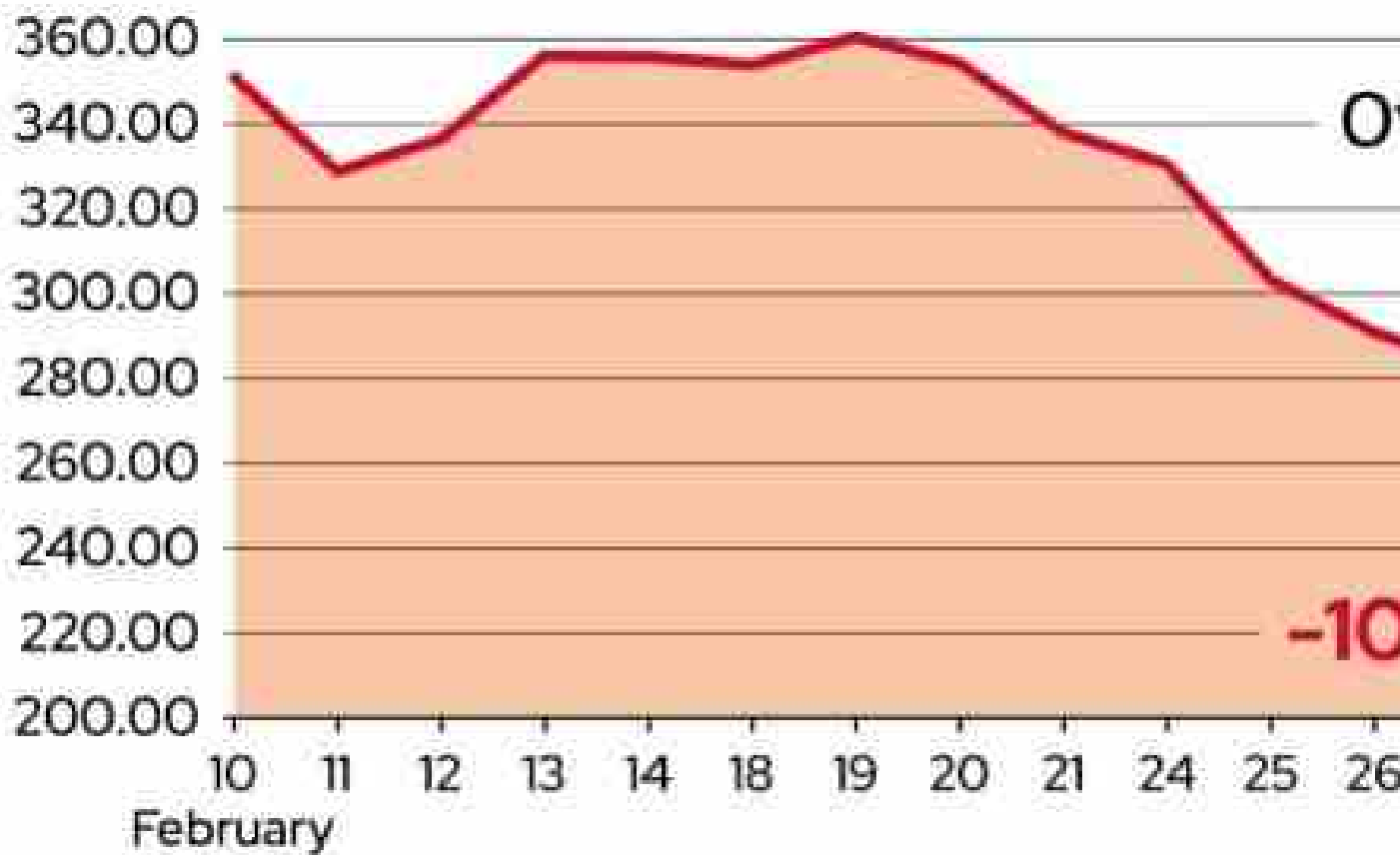
Few products are so intrinsically linked to the CEO of a company as the Tesla electric car has become to Elon Musk. Once, owning one of his electric cars alluded to an environmentally friendly driver who was on the road towards a greener future.

But now, Tesla is facing a backlash, with protests at its facilities across the US, and calls to boycott the brand, in response to Musk's political activity. The world's richest man is making sweeping cuts as the new head of US President Donald Trump's Department of Government Efficiency (Doge), and a slew of controversial behaviour – from apparently making the Nazi salute (which he denies) to endorsing Germany's AfD party – has quickly overshadowed any former green credentials.

A growing number of Tesla owners now see their car choice as an embarrassing symbol of an endorsement of his politics – on both sides of the pond.

Joanna and her husband in South East London are keen to offload their Tesla, but still have four months left of the lease. "It's a very strange thing because I've never really given a second thought about cars," says Joanna. "Now I feel like I'm driving around with a swastika on the front of my car, especially as we live in a liberal area... it doesn't show our personal beliefs." They bought it three years ago after moving to the capital, and wanted a more environmentally friendly car. She says they find it "frustrating" that they're going to have to change their car "because there's literally nothing wrong with it," but will try and part exchange for another electric vehicle.

Tesla shares



They're not alone. Some 59 per cent of British motorists have said that Elon Musk was putting them off buying a Tesla, in a survey by online car review site Electrifying in January. Many said they would now rather buy an electric car from a Chinese brand.

Following his speech and gesture at Trump's inauguration the words "Heil" and "boycott" were projected onto Tesla's Berlin Gigafactory so it appeared to read "Heil Tesla" or "Boycott Tesla". Spoof Tesla adverts have been spotted in London stating "Goes from 0 to 1939 in 3 seconds" with a picture of Musk appearing to do a Nazi salute coming out the rooftop of one of his vehicles.

Sales of Tesla cars have fallen sharply around the world in recent months – and were down by 12 per cent in the UK in January – despite registrations of EVs in the UK being up compared to the previous year, according to the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT).

Shares in the firm have fallen by more than 15 per cent – although analysts have said the main reason was fear about production targets and a drop in sales over the past year. Tesla doesn't dominate the electric car market in the way it did a few years ago – Western markets have been flooded with cheaper alternatives from brands such as BYD.



Nonetheless, it's clear that Musk's rebrand is part of the problem. This week, President Trump said "radical left lunatics" were boycotting the firm, adding that he would "buy a brand new Tesla" to support his adviser.

For environmentally conscious consumers, Musk's close involvement with Trump – who took the US out of the Paris climate agreement during his first presidency, and plans to cut back incentives to buy EVs in America – has proved a dealbreaker. Few products are so intrinsically linked to the CEO of a company as the Tesla electric car has become to Elon Musk. Once, owning one of his electric cars alluded to an environmentally friendly driver who was on the road towards a greener future.

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Tesla shares have plummeted over the past month yet are still up over the past year

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GRUENHEIDE, GERMANY - MARCH 22: Tesla CEO Elon Musk speaks during the official opening of the new Tesla electric car manufacturing plant on March 22, 2022 near Gruenheide, Germany. The new plant, officially called

the Gigafactory Berlin-Brandenburg, is producing the Model Y as well as electric car batteries. (Photo by Christian Marquardt - Pool/Getty Images)
In a recent survey, 59 per cent of British owners said Elon Musk puts them off buying a Tesla (Photo: Christian Marquardt/Getty Images)
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Ruthie Collins, a poet and writer who lives in the East of England, says after "comments like 'drill, baby, drill' from Trump and ramping up their reliance on fossil fuels," it feels "completely counterproductive to be in a car that's linked to that administration." She says she now sees their Tesla ownership as just "temporary" until their contract is up in September (having got the car in 2021).

She says she's inspired that other people are making the switch too, as "it's a great example of people putting their principles first". She says by cancelling foreign aid, among other things, Trump and Musk have "gone beyond the point of return," and that "we just can't be endorsing their actions".

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Emily Cleary from Buckinghamshire feels the same about Musk – but is in a dilemma over her Tesla, as it was left to her by her late stepfather and she's finding the idea of letting go of it hard. "If I'd just bought this car, I would have traded it into something else by now, but I've got a sentimental attachment to it. It's the fact that it's David's car," she explains, which it still says on the digital dashboard.

He was a relatively early adopter of Tesla and bought the car after wanting a greener future for younger generations. "He'd heard about Tesla and had it on pre-order and had to wait a good year or so for it. I think it was the second one in the country". He passed away five years ago and Emily and her family have kept the car, as "he really liked the idea of us being an all-electric family".

"I spoke to my mum about it, and she pointed out the car stickers that say 'we don't like him either'," which alienated Tesla owners are starting to buy and use. "It's a bit silly, but I feel like a point has to be made that I do not like Elon Musk," she adds.

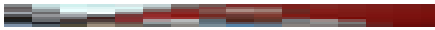
Many Tesla owners are worried that when it does come to selling their cars, they'll have lost value. "I think it'll obviously affect what we buy next, because the price might have dropped", says Emily.

If she sells, she'll lose a lifetime of free Tesla supercharging, a bonus that some of the earlier cars came with – but she says it's not enough of a pull to ensure their loyalty to the brand. "When we come to change our car, which will be soon... we are not going to get a Tesla, because of what it stands for."

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