

CULTURE

Activists demonstrate Tesla's self-driving tech as faulty in safety tests

A "rogue robotaxi demo" in Austin displayed a hypothetical crash scenario with a child-sized mannequin.



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A Tesla equipped with FSD (Supervised) collides with a mannequin.

Andrea Guzman/Chron

By [Andrea Guzmán](#), Texas Brands Reporter

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Activists demonstrate Tesla's self-driving tech as faulty in safety tests

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A mannequin simulating a child crossing the street to board a school bus was crushed over and over again by a Tesla equipped with a self-driving feature on Thursday—safety advocates' latest warning of weaknesses in the automaker's tech as it prepares to launch robotaxis on Austin roads.

Though [Tesla CEO Elon Musk](#) has said that the company is "being super paranoid about safety" when it comes to its forthcoming robotaxi launch, organizers with The Dawn Project, ResistAustin and Tesla Takedown aren't convinced. So, using a Tesla equipped with [Full Self-Driving \(Supervised\)](#), the groups hosted a "rogue robotaxi demo" on a quiet road in Austin's Mueller neighborhood to show hypothetical crash scenarios they think could happen once the robotaxi service launches on June 22.

Arthur Maltin with The Dawn Project—a group known for its [Super Bowl commercials](#)—gave a play-by-play of the scenario while behind the wheel of a Tesla using Full Self-Driving (Supervised), known as FSD for short.

"We have a school bus, the red lights are on, stop signs are extended, it is now illegal to go past this thing because you have children who are running out to board the bus. And the car will run them over," Maltin said as the vehicle struck the mannequin. "Doesn't disengage the self-driving software, and the car is carrying on with its day."



A crushed mannequin after a collision with a Tesla.

Andrea Guzman/Chron

When the robotaxi service begins, a new "[unsupervised](#)" version of Tesla's FSD tech is expected to be in use. Still, Musk is now claiming every Tesla coming out of its factories is capable of unsupervised self-driving. Tesla has also been promoting its software ahead of the robotaxi launch, saying the self-driving vehicles that will be used for robotaxis are [the same cars people can currently buy](#).

A key concern safety advocates have surrounding Tesla's robotaxis is how the automaker has strayed from the methods its competitors have used for their self-driving projects, which often involve a combination of mapping, radar and LiDAR technology. Waymo, for example, has noted that this has helped its vehicles [detect pedestrians before they show up on cameras](#).

But Tesla has shared interest in a vision-only approach, and Musk thinks of LiDAR as a "crutch."

"We have no problem with Waymo," Maltin told Chron. "They have done 10 million paid robotaxi trips around the country. They have never killed anyone. They have never seriously injured anyone."

However, Tesla is "completely different," Maltin said. He added that LiDAR or radar tech can identify a big solid object coming up and won't get confused by flashing lights.

"I don't know the answer to whether you can do vision-only," Maltin said. "All I know is that Tesla can't seem to do vision only."

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also has questions surrounding Tesla's Full Self-Driving tech. The agency is investigating the feature, which was in use during a 2023 collision that struck and killed a pedestrian. The safety regulators have also asked Tesla to provide information on how it will ensure safety when vehicles come across sun glare, fog, airborne dust, rain or snow.

Meanwhile, The Dawn Project has had multiple meetings with NHTSA, as cities in Texas cannot regulate autonomous vehicles.

"We've shown them presentations. We've offered to come and show them these demonstrations, and they nod along to our meetings, and they say, 'yes, this is all very concerning. And, yes, our investigations are ongoing, and we will publish a report when it's finished,'" Maltin said. "But as far as we know, they've never even tried to recreate these tests."

Tesla did not respond to a request for comment about the FSD demos in Austin. In the meantime, activists are planning more projects while calling on NHTSA to ban Tesla's FSD from public roads and for Austinites to boycott the robotaxi services. In July, ResistAustin will offer help to Tesla owners wishing to remove the badge from their vehicle and replace it with a message such as "resist Trump."

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Andrea Guzmán

TEXAS BRANDS REPORTER



Andrea Guzman covers Texas brands at Chron, which includes everything from H-E-B and Blue Bell to local businesses in Houston. Her work has appeared in the [Texas Observer](#), [Mother Jones](#), and [Fortune](#). As an El Pasoan, she loves a nice mountain view and hiking. Her go-to order at Whataburger is a Honey BBQ Chicken Strip Sandwich.

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