

5 Robots That Were Actually Just Humans in Costume

ROBOTS

5 Robots That Were Actually Just Humans in Costume

From frauds of the 1930s to Elon Musk's 2020s vaporware, we've compiled a collection of counterfeits.

By Matt Novak | 5/06/22 11:10AM | Comments (15) | Alerts



"Rupert the Robot" (right) with his "inventor" in London on January 11, 1938. Photo: Keystone-France/Gamma-Keystone (Getty Images)

The world of technology has always been filled with fakes, as people looking to make a quick buck try to pass off their "inventions" as the real deal. The world of robotics, though, holds a special place in the pantheon of phonies. It's a type of product that thrives on the wow-factor of a live demonstration, which leads desperate con artists to desperate measures.

The first robot butlers appeared in pop culture in the early 20th century—robots that would help serve lunch, clean the room while you watched TV, and even provide "companionship" to lonely women. Engineers have been trying to make robots real ever since, but a fair number of folks have tried to cut corners.

Some of the fakes, like Miss Honeywell from the 1960s, were an attempt to sell things. Other fakes were little more than cheap illusions. But there's one thing that all of the "robots" on our list share: They're just humans who were moving funny.

2 / 7

List slides



Rupert the Robot (1938)



List slides

Rupert the Robot (1938)



Previous

7 / 7

Start over



5 Robots That Were Actually Just Humans in Costume



Photo: Gamma-Keystone (Getty Images)

Rupert the Robot was supposedly the creation of German inventor Albert Creuziger. The alleged automaton showed off his skills at the Savoy hotel in London on January 12, 1938. Newspapers from the time were thoroughly convinced Rupert was the real deal.

In demonstrations, Rupert would smoke, pour a drink, put on his hat, and could even take you for a drive. One article even claimed Rupert cost \$20,000 to construct, over \$400,000 when you adjust for inflation.

The problem, of course, is that Rupert was just a man in make-up who walked with a stilted gait. Just look at that photo and remember that in 1938 the technology of television was still very much in its infancy. This “robot” was a complete fake.

3 / 7

List slides



Roberta the Robot (1965)



List slides

Roberta the Robot (1965)



Photo: Jacob Harris (AP)

New Yorkers passing by E.J. Korvette’s department store on May 17, 1965 may have noticed a curious thing in the window: a robot showing off the latest contraptions for sale. Or was it?

Previous

7 / 7

Start over



5 Robots That Were Actually Just Humans in Costume

ITEMS IN USE, AN WHITE ROBERTA THE ROBOT WAS DEMONSTRATING PRODUCTS. BUT ROBERTA was just a human dressed up like a robot, not unlike Miss Honeywell, who would come into existence just a few years later.

4 / 7

List slides



Miss Honeywell (1968)



List slides

Miss Honeywell (1968)

World's First Robotic Woman - 1968



Hailed by the newsreel company British Pathé as the “world’s first robotic woman,” this blue robot could do any number of human activities. That was because she was just a human dressed a robot costume.

The “robot,” known as [Miss Honeywell](#), emerges from a cabinet after an assistant pantomimes attaching her head and putting in the right electronics.

The operator twists some knobs on his console, and Miss Honeywell comes to life, jerking and moving like a 5-year-old trying to pretend they’re a robot. Unfortunately, we don’t have any polling to show just how many people in 1968 were taken in by the cheap trick, but with such amazing technological advances happening at rapid speed in the late 1960s—the moon landing was just a year away—you can’t judge passersby too harshly.

5 / 7

List slides



The Tin Man (1934)



List slides

The Tin Man (1934)



Previous

7 / 7

Start over



5 Robots That Were Actually Just Humans in Costume



Photo: Topical Press Agency (Getty Images)

If you happened to be walking outside a dance hall in Streatham, South London on January 31, 1934 you may have seen this bizarre mechanical man. And the puzzled looks say it all.

There isn't much known about this photo or what the "inventor" of the Tin Man was promoting. But whatever it was, they clearly got the attention they desired. Even if it's obviously a man dressed in a robot costume.

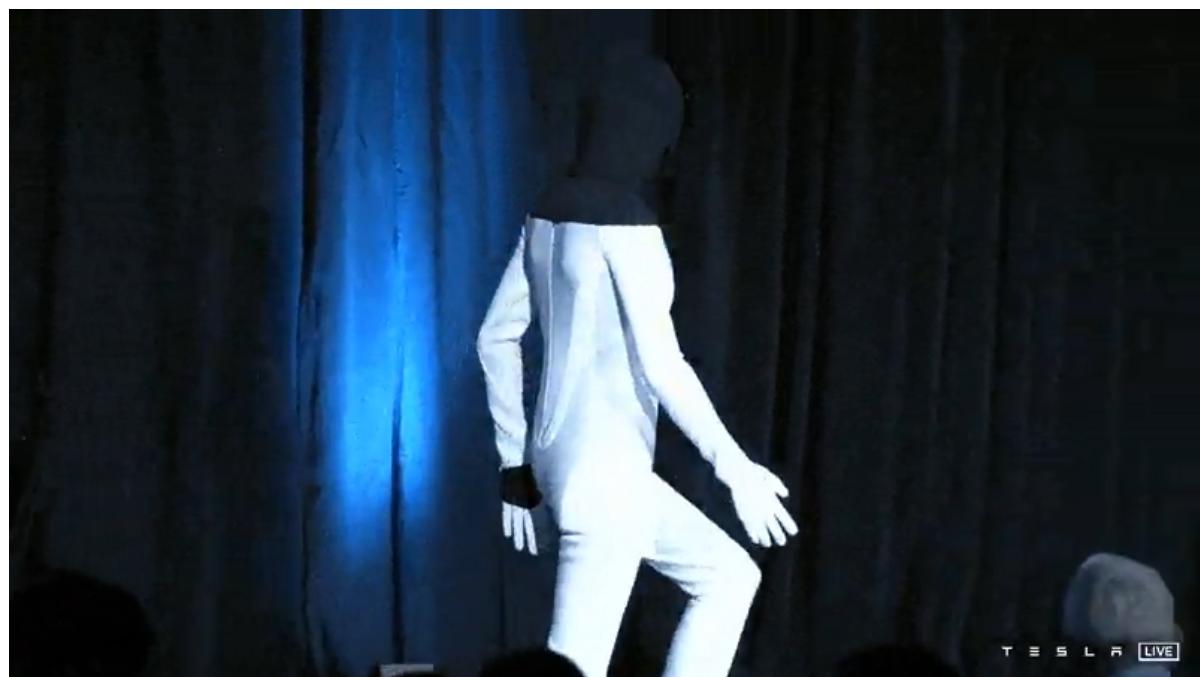
6 / 7

List slides

**Elon Musk's Vaporware**

List slides

Elon Musk's Vaporware



Gif: Tesla

Last, but not least, we have Elon Musk's idea for a robot that was unveiled in August of 2021 at a [Tesla event](#).

"The Tesla Bot *will* be real," Musk said, suggesting a prototype could be ready in 2022.

"Tesla is arguably the world's biggest robotics company because our cars are like semi-sentient robots on wheels," Musk insisted, quite a stretch by any real measure.

Sadly, mainstream media outlets like CNN and Fox Business wrote up Musk's promises as if they were real, even giving out specs like the Tesla Bot's height of 5 feet 8 inches and saying it will feature the same sensors as a Tesla car. But it's a human in a robot suit. And here in the middle of 2022, there's still not prototype of any kind.

7 / 7

List slides

List slides



< Previous

Start over

ADVERTISEMENT

COMICS

[Everyone Is Thirsty for the New Nonbinary Power Ranger](#)

[Previous](#)

7 / 7

[Start over](#)
