

AUTOMOTIVE

Consumer advocacy groups target Tesla ads over Autopilot feature

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Tesla is facing a potential FTC investigation. Image credit: Tesla

By STAFF REPORTS

U.S. automaker Tesla is facing scrutiny from the Center for Auto Safety and Consumer Watchdog, who claim the advertisements for its Autopilot feature are deceptive.

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The organizations have written a letter to the Federal Trade Commission chairman Joseph Simons, calling on the agency to investigate Tesla's marketing efforts. The groups claim Tesla is misrepresenting its Autopilot feature, causing consumers to believe its cars are self-driving and raising the potential for fatal accidents from misuse.

Autopilot advocacy

Tesla's Autopilot feature is not intended to be a hands-free technology, but rather a driver assistance tool. When consumers use the feature, they are meant to be able to keep hold of the wheel to be able to take control with no notice.

However, the advocacy groups say that the marketing of the feature, from the name to Tesla founder Elon Musk's statements, oversell the capabilities of Autopilot.

"Tesla has repeatedly exaggerated the autonomous capabilities of its Autopilot technology, boosting sales at the expense of consumer safety," said Jason Levine, executive director of the Center for Auto Safety, in a statement. "The FTC must step in and expose this charade before more Americans are injured or killed."



All of Tesla's vehicles are equipped with Autopilot. Image credit: Tesla

In 2016, a Tesla driver was in a fatal crash after activating autopilot.

U.S. authorities investigated the crash, which saw a Tesla Model S collide with the back end of a large truck in Florida. The fatality was called the first to occur on the road where self-driving technology was in use, raising skepticism that the general driving public is prepared to embrace autonomous automobiles fully ([see story](#)).

Another crash occurred this March, but the driver was found to be at fault for not taking control of the car despite warnings.

Tesla Motors, known for its technological advances in automotive and beyond, was also hit with a class action lawsuit last year claiming its Enhanced Autopilot software is nonfunctional and dangerous.

The group claims that Tesla is endangering the lives of its drivers after the automaker claimed the software would be released in December 2016, but remains inactive and not fully functional. The automaker has responded saying Tesla has always been transparent about the software having an incremental roll out and that many features are currently available ([see story](#)).

Despite the accidents and lawsuit, consumers have trust in Tesla for autonomous cars. An Autolist survey found that 32 percent of respondents trust Tesla more than other automakers to create self-driving cars, with the electric car manufacturer receiving the most consumer confidence.

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