

AUTOMOTIVE

Porsche draws lunar connection to promote Taycan

January 8, 2021



Charles Duke watches footage from Apollo 16 from his borrowed Taycan. Image credit: Porsche

By ELLEN KELLEHER

German automaker **Porsche** is linking the glories of the first electric car on the moon to the wonders of the all-electric Taycan with the recruitment of an astronaut who drives both in its latest campaign.

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To mark the 50th anniversary of the first landings of the lunar roving vehicle (LRV) on the moon, Porsche asked retired Brigadier General Charles M. Duke, the tenth person to step on the lunar surface, to take the Taycan for a spin. In comparing Brig. Gen. Duke's impressions of the car to his marshaling of a vehicle in space, Porsche links its brand with a pioneering spirit of adventure and ratchets up its appeal for an American audience.

"This campaign definitely sets the brand apart from its competitors," said David Undercoffler, editor in chief of **Autolist**, San Francisco. "It's a savvy marketing move by Porsche for a U.S. audience because it ties the German automaker to an inherently American ideal: space exploration."

Lunar ties

One of just six people to do so, Brig. Gen. Duke got the chance to drive a LRV in April of 1972 as the lunar module pilot on Apollo 16.

Now 85, Brig. Gen. Duke and fellow astronaut Captain James Young spent over 70 hours on the lunar surface, conducting numerous research missions and probing the LRV's workings.

In a short, Porsche offers a look at the LRV in action in 1972 and compares its abilities to the Taycan. Brig. Gen. Duke takes the electric sports car for a drive at a vacant airport runway strip in Texas on the carmaker's suggestion.

The video offers a glimpse of life on Apollo 16

Partly narrated by Brig. Gen. Duke, the video pivots quickly from the lift-off and landing on the moon of the Apollo 16 spacecraft to shots of the LRV touring the lunar landscape.

In the early 1970s the LRV was a radical piece of technology, developed in just 17 months and weighing a mere 210 kilograms, or 462 pounds. On the moon, the car weighed 80 pounds, but could carry 1,200 pounds.



Mr. Duke's Taycan tour marked his first time in an EV. Image credit: Porsche

"In my view the Rover was the first real reliable, rugged and dependable electric car," Brig. Gen. Duke says. "It had two batteries and about 100 hours of power.

"Each wheel had its own independent suspension and the tires were made out of wire, which I thought was crazy at first," he says. "But somebody had an ingenious idea because wire tires would dig into the dust which gave you really good traction."

Dressed casually in a blue NASA jacket and jeans, he and Capt. Young felt "right at home" on the moon as if they'd been there before.

The LVR allowed the astronauts to go 7 kilometers in distance when they could only have gone 400 meters by walking.

Still sitting on the lunar surface and gathering moon dust, the LVR's abandonment prompts Brig. Gen. Duke to joke: "If you want an \$8 million car with a dead battery, I can tell you where to get one."

The second-half of the footage ties the narrative to Porsche as it captures Brig. Gen. Duke's first turn at driving an electric car, which he does at a small airport near Austin.



Non-lunar shots in the short are filmed at a Texan airport. Image credit: Porsche

"I've driven golf carts of course," Brig. Gen. Duke says. "But down here on earth I had never driven a car that was all-electric."

Impressed by its agility and speed, Brig. Gen. Duke calls the Taycan's technology "an order of magnitude over our Rover."

In the closing shots, Brig. Gen. Duke drives the borrowed car to an outdoor movie theatre. He then parks to watch himself driving the LVR on the Apollo 16 mission, a move which serves to reinforce Porsche's attempts at branding.

Brig. Gen. Duke was recently seen in a campaign from Swiss watchmaker Omega, which also reflected on the Apollo program ([see story](#)).

Taycan's promotion

As its most recent campaign suggests, Porsche is on a vigorous campaign to promote the Taycan.

Late last year, it kickstarted its roll-out in the Middle East, for instance, with a glitzy light show on the Burj Khalifa in

Dubai.

The spindly tower which peers over the streets of Dubai is the tallest building in the world at 828 meters, or 2,718 feet, high. Porsche's rental of it for the display symbolizes all of its aspirations for the first three Taycan models: the 4S, Turbo and Turbo S, to be sold across the Arab world and in Africa ([see story](#)).

By 2025, Porsche expects half the cars it sells to have a plug, whether they are entirely battery powered or hybrids ([see story](#)).

"The Taycan has definitely been a sales success, especially when you consider its high price tag," Mr. Undercoffler said. "While it hasn't reached Europe's level of popularity, it regularly outsold Porsche's more traditional cars in the U.S. throughout 2020 and should continue to do the same in 2021."

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