

Apple Presses Ahead with Efforts to Create Car

News Article



Apple is continuing its efforts to create a car, though some of the big questions around the project remain undecided.

The company is still working out whether it will make a self-driving car, an electric vehicle or a combination of the two, according to a person with knowledge of the product, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, as Apple is known for its intense secretiveness. It is not unusual for Apple to work on several prototypes of a product at the same time, as it did with the iPhone and the iPad.

Other details of the car project are falling into place. Apple is committing hundreds of people to the effort, and meeting with officials of the California Department of Motor Vehicles and of a testing ground for self-driving cars, said the person with knowledge of the work. The Wall Street Journal and The Guardian previously reported on those developments. Apple is aiming to introduce some sort of car product around 2020, several people with knowledge of the project said.

Apple declined to comment for this article.

Since reports that Apple, the world's most valuable company, was working on a car surfaced in February, the auto and tech industries have closely watched any progress, because Apple could transform the car industry the same way it did the mobile phone industry. Vehicles, which are essentially turning into moving computers, could be a huge new platform for technology companies. Google

and Uber are both working on self-driving vehicles.

At the Frankfurt International Motor Show this month, carmakers were obsessed with what the nonauto companies like Apple and Google might be developing. Detroit has come a long way since the financial crisis, and advanced sensor-based safety features are available on many models of cars from Ford and General Motors. But none of them have the software expertise of a company like Apple, and they do not want to be stuck manufacturing the bodies of the vehicles while another company controls the more lucrative software.

"We do not plan to become the Foxconn of Apple," Dieter Zetsche, the chief executive of Daimler, told reporters at the auto show in Frankfurt.

Sergio Marchionne, the chief executive of Fiat Chrysler, has sought a relationship with Apple. This year, he met with Timothy D. Cook, Apple's Chief Executive, during a three-day trip to California. In an interview this spring, he called companies like Apple and Google "disrupters." After a speech this spring, he said of the technologies they were inventing: "It's not science fiction. They're coming."

Mr. Cook has sidestepped questions about a car.

Apple has about 600 employees working on the undertaking, called Project Titan, according to a person with knowledge of the project. Apple is deploying more internal resources to Titan, pulling people from other projects, like the Apple Watch, to work on it, said two people with knowledge of the plans.

Apple executives recently met with the California Department of Motor Vehicles (D.M.V.), which in 2012 was tasked with promulgating self-driving car regulations. In a statement, the department said the "D.M.V. often meets with various companies regarding D.M.V. operations. The Apple meeting was to review D.M.V.'s autonomous vehicle regulations."

Apple engineers have also met with officials from GoMentum Station in Concord, California, which is known as a testing ground for self-driving cars, according to a person with knowledge of the meeting.

Source: The New York Times