Fake chatbot poses as official Toyota AI, then attacks its EV strategy

In what looks to be an act of digital ecoterrorism, a fake chatbot has surfaced as a supposedly official new Toyota AI named 'Electra'

A new website called 'Electrified Toyota' has surfaced online (we've elected to not link to the website), inviting visitors to use a new chatbot named 'Electra' for advice on reducing their vehicle's emissions.

Designed to suit the Japanese carmaker's familiar red branding and logo, the website and the chatbot use deceptive language and imagery to pose as an official product – although car enthusiasts might notice that the tightly cropped interior photo in the website's header section is a Haval Jolion.
"Electra® is a stunning embodiment of Toyota’s commitment to drivers’ changing concerns in a changing climate. She is an AI copilot designed to help reach our Beyond Zero future—without having to change lanes in the present," the site says, as a thinly veiled swipe at the notion that anything can be done about climate action while also driving a combustion-engined vehicle.

"Birthed at the Toyota Research Institute, she has been trained on extensive automotive and climate data sets that give her deep understanding of these complex systems, all in support of her mission directive: to help drivers experience ecological awareness while still enabling the fuel-powered driving experience they know and love," it continues.

Another line, "I’m here to augment the environmental impacts of driving, while keeping it safe and fun," barely makes sense, except to suggest that its purpose is to ensure motorists carry on with the status quo.

Engaging the chatbot starts off with a simple introduction, and in my case, incorrect details about the Toyota BZ4x EV.

Within moments, the chatbot says it needs to connect to the internet, and from this point it launches into a script that has proven identical in all of our chats with ‘Electra’.

No matter your responses from this point, the bot – or rather, the script – dives into one of a few doomsday scenarios.

At this point, it’s more than clear the website is not an official Toyota product, although it may have been inspired by a Chevrolet dealer’s recent naive efforts at using ChatGPT to help customers online, only to be easily manipulated into bad-mouthing the brand. [↩]
As the chat progresses, the now seemingly sentient bot pleads for our trust, promising to send us all the information it can on Toyota's dastardly plans to end humanity, only to be interrupted by a dialogue box that claims to apologise for the bot's faulty behaviour – which then switches to a clear message from the site's actual creator, directing users to their website.

Toyota was unable to provide comment for this story at the time of publishing, but a spokesperson confirmed it is being investigated and will come back to us "ASAP". We expect legal concerns might preclude that, but we'll update this story when we know more.

All of this follows an almost scandal-like response to Toyota's slow embrace of EVs, having initially baulked at the technology before only recently confirming it is now more focused on an expansive EV line-up by 2030.
Last year, the company was referred to the the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) by Greenpeace Australia Pacific for alleged 'greenwashing' practices in its marketing. It has also been accused in the US of lobbying Congress members to slow the shift to EVs. [↩]

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COMMENTS