

A SAGA IS BORN

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BY JALIL ABDUL HAMID

SHAH ALAM, JULY 9 (BERNAMA ES)-- +IT'S SO LIVELY,+ SAID DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMAD AS HE GOT DOWN FROM A METALLIC-BLUE 1.5S PROTON SAGA, THE FIRST MALAYSIAN CAR, AFTER A 15-MINUTE TEST DRIVE.

THE PRIME MINISTER HAD JUST TAKEN THE CAR ON THE TEST COURSE OF THE SPRAWLING 56-HECTARE PROTON COMPLEX HERE AFTER HE HAD OFFICIALLY LAUNCHED THE CAR.

+I DROVE THE CAR UP TO 120 KM PER HOUR AND I FIND IT GOOD AND HAS LIGHT STEERING,+ HE TOLD REPORTERS.

+ MY WIFE ALSO TEST-DROVE ONE AND I THINK SHE LIKES THE CAR.+

DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR WAS ACCOMPANIED BY PROTON CHAIRMAN TAN SERI JAMIL JAN, A PROTON ENGINEER AND A SECURITY OFFICER DURING THE BRIEF TEST RUN.

THE CAR, WHICH ROLLED OFF THE PRODUCTION LINE EARLIER, HAS A UNIQUE WEDGE-SHAPED BODY WITH DUCKTAIL BOOT. IT HAS 40 PER CENT LOCAL CONTENT, MORE THAN DOUBLE THAT OF THE USUAL LOCALLY-ASSEMBLED CARS.

EARLIER, WITNESSED BY SOME 1,500 LOCAL AND FOREIGN DIGNITARIES, DATUK SERI MAHATHIR PLANTED A SAGA TREE AND THEN PRESSED A BUTTON AT THE ASSEMBLY PLANT TO START THE COMMERCIAL PRODUCTION OF THE CAR, WHICH IS THE OUTCOME OF A JOINT-VENTURE BETWEEN THE HEAVY INDUSTRIES CORPORATION OF MALAYSIA (HICOM), MITSUBISHI MOTORS AND MITSUBISHI CORP. OF JAPAN.

HICOM, WHICH WAS SET UP TO SPEARHEAD MALAYSIA'S THRUST INTO THE HEAVY INDUSTRIES, HOLDS A 70 PER CENT STAKE IN THE CAR PROJECT WHICH IS FUNDED MAINLY FROM EXTERNAL BORROWINGS.

ALSO PRESENT AT THE CEREMONY WERE TOP OFFICIALS FROM MITSUBISHI, HEADS OF FOREIGN MISSIONS AND LOCAL CAR ASSEMBLERS.

BUT EVEN DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR, LIKE OTHER BUYERS, WILL HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL SEPTEMBER BEFORE HE CAN HAVE HIS BRAND NEW SAGA AS IT WILL NOT BE OFFICIALLY ON SALE UNTIL THEN.

+I WANTED TO HAVE THE CAR (THE METALLIC-BLUE 1.5S) NOW BUT THE PROTON PEOPLE SAID I HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL SEPTEMBER,+ HE SAID.

+THE CAR WILL BE METALLIC-BLUE,+ HE SAID. +IT MAY OR MAY NOT BE THE SAME CAR AS I TEST DROVE, BUT IT WILL BE THE SAME COLOUR.+

HE WAS MUM HOWEVER WHEN ASKED ABOUT THE PRICES OF THE SAGA.

+EON (EDARAN OTOMOBIL NASIONAL, THE PROTON DISTRIBUTOR) IS STILL WORKING ON THE PRICES AND I HOPE THEY WOULD MAKE THE ANNOUNCEMENT SHORTLY,+ HE SAID.

HE ALSO DECLINED TO SAY HOW MANY OF THE MALAYSIAN CARS HAVE BEEN SOLD SO FAR.

PROTON EARLIER SAID THE 1.5 MODEL WOULD BE PRICED BELOW \$22,000 AND THE 1.3 MODEL AT LESS THAN \$20,800.

IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE LAUNCHING, EON SET UP TWO SPECIAL BOOTHS TO FACILITATE BOOKINGS. A NUMBER OF GUESTS SIGNED UP TO BOOK THE CARS, EON OFFICIALS SAID. --MORE

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A SAGA IS BORN KUALA LUMPUR

TAN SRI JAMIL JAN, IN HIS WELCOMING SPEECH, SAID TESTS CARRIED OUT BY PROTON PROVED THAT THE CAR OUTPERFORMED ITS CLOSE RIVALS IN MANY ASPECTS.

HE SAID THE TESTS, WHICH WERE CONDUCTED UNDER LOCAL ROAD CONDITIONS, HAD SHOWED THAT PROTON SAGA NOT ONLY MATCHED, BUT ALSO PERFORMED BETTER THAN ITS RIVALS.

+ THESE TESTS HAVE CONCLUSIVELY PROVEN BEYOND DOUBT THAT WE CAN ALL BE PROUD OF THE QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE OF THE SAGA,+ HE SAID.

LATER, SPEAKING TO REPORTERS, PROTON GENERAL MANAGER DATUK WAN NIK ISMAIL SAID THAT PROTON WOULD ONLY INTRODUCE THE I SERIES NEXT YEAR. AT PRESENT ONLY THE S SERIES (MEDIUM VARIAT) WOULD BE ON THE MARKET.

HE SAID PRODUCTION FOR THIS YEAR HAS BEEN LIMITED TO 7,500 UNITS. IT WOULD BE INCREASED TO 40,200 UNITS BY NEXT YEAR AND ULTIMATELY TO 120,000 UNITS FROM 1990 ONWARDS.

ON THE CONVERSION TO LIQUEFIED PETROLEUM GAS (LPG), DATUK WAN NIK ISMAIL SAID: +WE ARE READY WHEN IT COMES. UNLIKE OTHER LOCAL CAR ASSEMBLERS, WE HAVE ALREADY MADE PROVISION FOR THAT.+ --BERNAMA ES