

# Proton Wira marks new technology era

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By OUR REPORTER *P*

THE Proton Wira, the newest model of the national car Proton Saga launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad last night, marks Malaysia's entry into a new technological era, particularly that of sophisticated automotive technology.

Dr Mahathir said it shows that Malaysians are capable of absorbing technological knowledge. In a speech at the launch of the car, carried live by over RTM and TV3, he also said the successful production and launch of the car will help silence critics who had doubted the ability of Malaysians to acquire skills associated with high technology.

The end-product, shown to the whole nation for the first time last night, is the result of a lot of hard work which started four and half years ago. Its sophisticated technology and the careful planning, research and development, and engineering expertise involved reflect well on Proton's local workforce.

More than 4,000 units of Proton Wira had been booked in about a month and this without even a look at the product first which shows the confidence of Malaysians in the national car.

Dr Mahathir said the project has contributed positively towards the achievement of the Government's objective of upgrading local expertise in engineering and its success has opened up even more opportunities for Malaysians.

The support industry has expanded to comprise more than 100 companies involved in the manufacture and sup-

ply of some 1,200 components of the car, Dr Mahathir said, adding that Proton's local content has gone up to 80 per cent.

The success of the national car has proven many of its critics wrong. When Malaysia first ventured into the project many had said that it would be a failure. However, today the car is not only a bestseller at home but has also made strong inroads into overseas markets, including the UK. Recognition of its quality, standard and achievements are evident from the six gold awards it has won at the Birmingham International Motor Show in

the UK.

Dr Mahathir said even more countries have shown keen interest in the national car, suggesting that the introduction of a left-hand drive model may be timely now. He hoped that with the launch of the Proton Wira efforts to seek new markets will be stepped up.

Although Proton's production capacity has been increased from 80,000 to 120,000 units a year, the interest shown by some countries which have yet to import the national car, including left-hand drive countries, means that even

higher capacity is needed.

"I hope Proton will give serious attention to exports and prepare itself for this. With increased volume, not only will economies of scale be realised, the accompanying supportive industry will also grow rapidly. Malaysia will then be able to supply components to the automotive industries of other countries," he added.

Impressed with the Proton Wira's aerodynamic and modern lines as well as its additional safety features, Dr Mahathir said: "I am sure the Proton Wira is top value for money and will be viewed favourably interna-

tionally among cars of similar class."

Dr Mahathir said the Proton Wira is the product of Malaysian creativity, research and effort. "This means that part of the Government's objective to increase local capability in engineering, including production engineering, has been achieved. But Proton needs to intensify its research and development efforts to ensure that the national car's performance remains competitive in the international market.

"Proton also needs to continue to make cosmetic changes to its models, and when necessary, create new ones to provide satisfaction to customers whose tastes are always changing," he advised.

The Prime Minister said the success of any business enterprise depends on its after-sales service. Customer confidence in any product will partly depend on this, together with relevant advice, guidance and repairs when needed.

"In the automotive industry, the after-sales service is very important. In this regard, the national car's major distributor, Edaran Otomobil Nasional (EON), must ensure reliable and good after-sales service," he said.

There are now more than 400,000 Proton cars on the road. The Prime Minister said this opens up a new possibility for the motor trade — that of reconditioned cars. He said the birth of the reconditioned car industry will not only make cars retain their quality, but create the possibility of an export market if their prices were reasonable.