

30 DEC 1996

USPD TARGETS TO SELL 210 PORTON PUTRA PER MONTH

SHAH ALAM, Dec 30 (Bernama) -- Usahasama Proton DRB Sdn Bhd (USPD), the distributor of Proton Putra, the coupe Proton variant launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today, targets to sell 210 units of the car each month.

USPD chief executive officer, Abdul Rashid Abdul Rahim said the number was rather at the high-end as being a car of a niche market, the company did not expect high volume sales for the model.

Speaking to newsmen after the launch here, he said Putra was targetted for a small select group, as its sporty features like sport seats and "momo" sports steering should appeal to the younger generation.

Putra, powered by a 1.8 litre four-cylinder in line 16 valve DOHC engine coupled with five speed manual gearbox, is priced at RM68,887.48.

The coupe would contribute eight to 12 percent of USPD sales volume as the Satria model now selling at 1,800 units per month would remain USPD's bestselling car, explained Abdul Rashid.

USPD other models'namely Tiara sees monthly sales of close to 1,500 units while the Wira Aeroback, 1,000 units per month.

He said initially, Putra was meant for the foreign markets but last June it was decided that the car be marketed locally.

Putra's first export market would be the United Kingdom, where launching is expected to take place by the second quarter of 1997.

The coupe would be produced at USPD's associate company, Proton Shah Alam medium volume plant in July to Aug 1997, but until then, it would share the Satria assembly line at USPD's plant in Pekan, Pahang.

Abdul Rashid also disclosed that plans had been made so that Edaran Otomobil Nasional (EON) and USPD would share their services network so as to avoid duplication of investment and "stealing each other's staffs."

Unlike USPD, which distributes the relatively cheaper (Tiara) to sportier Proton models, EON markets Proton's sedan to luxury models. Both EON and USPD have about 250 service outlets.

He also said there were now more concerted efforts among EON, USPD and Proton to meet the changing needs and taste of customers and this had resulted in wider choices to the customers.

Asked whether production of the Iswara models would be scrapped, Abdul Rashid said "as for now there is no intention to discontinue Iswara."

He described Iswara as "a car that refuses to die," adding that demand for the model hovered around 4,000 units per month.

"We can never keep up despite producing 60,000 Iswara per year," he said. But he admitted that in certain overseas market "the model will die a natural death" due to the high investment required to re-certify the car to meet the markets' strict safety standards.

Abdul Rashid, who is also chief executive officer of Proton Corporation Sdn Bhd, the Proton arm that facilitates sales of Proton cars in domestic and export markets, said a new Proton model would only be announced in 1999. -- BERNAMA

AD FR