

25/08/1998

First made-in-Malaysia 4WD vehicle launched

Rashid Yusof; Rupa Damodaran

MALAYSIA'S first four-wheel drive vehicle, the Perodua Kembara, was launched yesterday amidst heavy rain at the Putra World Trade Centre in Kuala Lumpur.

And as if to symbolise the car's ruggedness, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad drove off in the first Kembara to be registered - bearing the registration number of WGN 2020 - in the heavy rain at the end of the ceremony.

The 1.3 litre vehicle, manufactured at Perusahaan Otomobil Kedua Sdn Bhd's plant in Serendah, Selangor, was given the thumbs up by Dr Mahathir, car dealers and guests at the ceremony.

Signifying its potential attraction to customers, a total of 475 units of the car have been booked even though sales have not started.

The launching also coincided with Perodua's introduction of a new logo which, among others, represents a renewed sense of direction, and the award of ISO 9001 to Perodua by Britain's Vehicles Certification Agency.

Speaking at the launch, Dr Mahathir was confident Malaysians would like the Kembara especially as it was the cheapest in its category.

It comes at a time when many car buyers are looking for a more aerodynamic four-wheel drive vehicle as compared to other versions in the market.

"The new four-wheel drive looks somewhere between a car and an old station wagon.

"We are making some progress," said the Prime Minister.

He added that Malaysia was still able to introduce a new car into the market despite the economic downturn.

This suggests considerable confidence on the part of Perodua in the domestic car market.

The Prime Minister said the launch also showed that the Malaysian economy was not in such a bad shape as made out to be by some.

It showed that Malaysians have the purchasing power - or as Dr Mahathir described in a lighter vein, "... despite (being) said to be bankrupt, the people still have RM2, RM3 (dua, tiga ringgit) to buy a Kembara."

He said as a developing country, Malaysia should take pride in being able to launch a car at a time when the economy was not doing very well.

To the applause by those present, Dr Mahathir added it was thus peculiar for Malaysia to be introducing a new car when some quarters have the view that the economy was in a critical state.

"There must be something wrong with the perception of Malaysians of the economic downturn ... we are doing all the wrong things," he said, in a light-hearted manner, and met by more applause.

Dr Mahathir also alluded to comments by foreign journalists, adding that in footballing terms they were like the spectators who seem to know better than the players.

"We are in the business of running this country and one of the things we want to do is, of course, to revive the economy.

"Whatever they think of our ability to score, we can do many things by ourselves, for ourselves."

A total of 175,817 Kancil cars and 18,806 Rusa have been sold up to July 31.

Dr Mahathir said he drove a 850cc Kancil yesterday (at the opening of the International Broadcast Centre in Angkasapuri) and found it to be

powerful, considering its size.

He commended Perodua staff and management whom he described as being aggressive in exploring new markets, despite the economic downturn, with many enquiries on the car coming from abroad.

(END)