

21 FEB 1998

POEM GEARING ITSELF TO BOOST ELECTRIC VEHICLE PRODUCTION

KAJANG, Feb 21 (Bernama) -- Perusahaan Otomobil Elektrik (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, the company which is undertaking Malaysia's first electric car project, is gearing itself to produce as many electric vehicles it can to overcome the whelming demand it is currently enjoying domestically.

Its general manager operation, Azlan Robert said no matter how many number of electric cars the company produced since production began in November, it has not not been able to cope with demand which far exceeded supply.

"At this moment, our orders outstrip our capability to produce," he told newsmen after the handing over of 10 units of POEM's maiden electric car models called "Eleksuria" to Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN).

The current overwhelming demand, Azlan said has forced the company to embark on a production plan which will see about 2,000 mixed variants of electric cars produced this year.

"To gear ourselves up to meet this production plan will not be a problem because the six-month old POEM, which actually commenced production only in November, is able to produce theoritically, eight units a day, or 240 units a month easily," he said.

POEM is the brainchild of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who launched the first "Solar Baby" electric vehicle called "Eleksuria" in December at its production plant here.

Other than Tenaga Nasional Bhd, United Kingdom's Frazer-Nash Research Ltd, owns 40 percent of POEM, Datuk Mohd Nadzmi Mohd Salleh and Tan Sri Basir Ismail own five percent each in the equity of POEM, which was incorporated last March with a paid-up capital of RM10 million.

Azlan said POEM has no plans to contract out the assembly of its vehicles, but it intends to further speed up the localisation process for components and parts in order to solve its production constraints.

POEM, he said is in the midst of negotiating as well as finalising a few deals for the localisation of components and parts for the vehicle's body, which is basically made by composite materials.

"The faster we localise all the body parts and components, the faster we will be able to achieve our target of producing 2,000 units a year," he said, adding that the company has identified an Ipoh-based glass reinforced plastic body manufacturer which has the expertise and know-how in composite vehicle body manufacturing.

On overseas orders, he said the company is yet to receive any, but there have been enquiries especially from American, Japanese, Philippines and Indonesian companies.

These enquiries were received when POEM participated during the week-long Langkawi International Maritime and Aerospace Exhibition (LIMA) held last year in Langkawi, Kedah.

POEM's electric four-wheel vehicles, tagged at around RM40,000 a unit, depending on body designs, accessories and one-year free maintenance service, will be produced in four variants which are the "Eleksuria", "Golf-Buggy", "Hairods-Buggy" and "Airport-Buggy".

Azlan said the four models are tailored for different purposes. Eleksuria is designed as a mass passenger mover, Golf-Buggy for resorts and golf course operations, Harrods-Buggy for the British-bound luxury supermarket and retail chain Harrods while Airport-Buggy is for airport use.

He said POEM is also committed in making a very exclusive off-highway solar assisted electric vehicle like "Go-Kart", for car racing enthusiasts.

Orders received so far are mostly from holiday and golf resorts, hotels and the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

Azlan said a company, which operates an amusement park and an indoor go-kart track in Penang has placed several orders while an amusement park operator, has ordered an initial 30 "go-karts" for his business which will start in April.

Eleksuria, he said is a passenger mover or utility vehicle which is used in big areas such as campuses, lage-scale hotels and holiday resorts, chalets and even a large industrial base.

The vehicle is also suitable for use in huge airports like the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA), which needs to transport boarders and luggage within its large parking space and the main terminal building.

Azlan also said that POEM has so far manufactured 16 "Eleksuria" and 4 "go-kart" and intends to produce a total of 80 units of mixed variants starting next month, after which it should be able to break even. --

BERNAMA

RIZ DVS