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## A Malaysian success story

WHEN it rolled out its first passenger car tyre in 1991, the three other tyre companies must have been anxious about price undercutting and the erosion of their Malaysian market share.

But the name Silverstone must have been quite a give-away as to the export oriented objectives of the pioneer members. Even the original name, Silverstone Tire and Rubber Co, spelt tyre the American way.

Today, Silverstone is called Silverstone Berhad, in preparation for listing on the KLSE and its new corporate direction for the next millennium. Formula 1 sponsorship to carve out a world market share perhaps?

The Asian crisis in 1997 put the brakes on the group's plans. However, the economic situation quickly eased up and the recovery in KL and Asia comes from on-the-ball Asian managers like those from Silverstone.

As one of the Lion Group's eight core businesses, Silverstone's success and heady growth stems from one of the most aggressive management teams in the Malaysian corporate culture. More importantly, as a Malaysian-owned company, it has no constraints to growth, unlike overseas-controlled Malaysian tyre manufacturers.

The result? Global exports to over 50 countries.

Lab results are translated into the acquisition of the latest state-of-the-art machinery and quality processes that meet the specifications set by international governing authorities. The high quality standards have qualified it for certification from Malaysia's SIRIM, UK's E11 and the USA's D.O.T markings of quality as well as the ISO 9002 BVQi certification of quality management.

Through its pursuit of excellence in technological advancement and innovation, Silverstone has achieved many "firsts" in Malaysia. For example, it was the first to produce the all steel tubeless radial truck tyre and the Z-rated low-profile tyre. It was also the first to produce and export rally tyres.

From the commissioning in 1989 of its modern linear plant, Silverstone strategised its production and marketing plans. Its first product for the passenger car was the Firefox, which earned the company a reputation for durability and high mileage as per its planned product positioning.

In tandem with the market demand for better speed-rating, the STV 138 was developed to achieve a V-rating (speed tested to 240 kph), another "first" for Silverstone. And as the mid-size car market, like the Protons, grew more sophisticated, the Silverstone STV 128 was produced to meet the requirements for a more comfortable ride.

When the consumers' expectations of a high performance tyre grew, Silverstone's marketing focus switched to motorsports as its advertising and promotion platform. Motorsports is the ultimate testimony to the quality of tyres especially since Silverstone's participation in motorsports covers the total perspective of rallies, track events and high speed formula races as well as 4X4 activities.

Motorsports also provide Silverstone with a rich source of information, a database of actual performance data, which is channelled into research and development processes to make superior tyres. New patterns have been designed to perform under adverse conditions, whilst rubber compounds which offer stronger resilience were formulated and tyre construction engineering improved to withstand demanding usages of the discerning

consumers.

In the application of racing experience to the development of tyres, the drivers and tyre engineers give their input to the development of new ranges of passenger car tyres as in the case of the Low-Profile, High Performance range of the Silverstone STZ Sport, SSV Sport and FTZ Sport.

In world-class rallies, 'Monster' Tajima, a top-notch F.I.A. driver has carved a big name for Silverstone whilst Australian Russell Palmer has also shown his prowess in international rallies. Tyres developed from these rallies are the S55 and the asymmetrical directional S525, making Silverstone the first tyre manufacturer in this region to produce and export rally tyres.

At the forefront of 4X4 motorsports in Malaysia, Silverstone stamped its mark by producing tyres that would meet the discerning demand of the 4X4 enthusiasts, from rally to adventure off-roading. Silverstone even created special events like the Silverstone KMA Isuzu 4X4 Borneo Circuit Challenge to bring out the best in 4X4 motorsports, pushing man, machine and tyres to the limit.

Culminating its experience and expertise in 4X4 tyres, Silverstone designed and developed the MT 117EX specifically for the Silverstone TransAfrica Expedition, a 17,000km, 33 days journey from Cape Town to Cairo, crossing 3 geographic zone with varying climatic conditions, terrain and road surfaces. The MT 117EX's proven performance has put the tyre a class above the rest. Silverstone guys call it the "Conqueror of Africa".

But why just be a sponsor and a bridesmaid? Why just TransPeninsula and club events? Why not make your own big event? And thus grew a series of major international expeditions which showed Silverstone's mastery of event management and brand management.

Silverstone's subsequent phase as a world-class company went beyond research and development to embrace a bigger role, as a corporate citizen, to strengthen bilateral relationships with other countries.

The Silverstone Inner Mongolia Expedition fostered ties with Thailand, Laos and China. And the Silverstone TransAfrica Expedition under the patronage of Malaysia's Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, traversed 12 African countries on a historic Malaysia mission of peace, goodwill and harmony to Africa.

Another of Silverstone's advantages is its clear management hierarchy, its focus and its professionalism. In practical terms, this translates to fast management decisions, and quick product cycles by the factory.

When breakthroughs are attained, Silverstone possesses the production flexibility and the management direction to swiftly launch new tyre patterns and designs that stay ahead and meet the needs of the competitive environment.