

Proton Waja conforms to all necessary regulations up to 2003

By **EIRMALASARE BANI**

PROTON Waja, the country's first locally-designed car, has conformed to and met all the necessary regulations up to 2003, the year when all tariff barriers for intra-Asean trade including the automotive sector, are to be substantially lowered.

Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) director of operations Datuk Kisai Rahmat said the company plans to manufacture as many Wajas as possible by dedicating one of its facilities in Shah Alam which has an annual capacity of producing up to 50,000 Proton cars for its production.

"We believe that Waja is a good car. It has conformed and met all the regulations up to perhaps 2003. Whatever requirements for crash-worthiness, emissions... we have done it with Waja. I believe Waja will receive tremendous response from the public," he told reporters in Shah Alam yesterday.

Malaysia earlier this year postponed its participation in the Asean Free Trade Area (Afta) automotive programme, and would instead lower its tariffs for foreign cars in 2005.

Once the programme is implemented, national car companies within the region are expected to face direct competition from the world's automotive manufacturers.

Proton Waja, for example, will be competing against the likes of Audi A4, Honda Accord, Peugeot 406 and Opel Vectra.

The Waja was unveiled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in May.

The launch also sees Proton moving a step forward in its attempt not to be overly dependent on foreign partners such as Mitsubishi Motors Corp and France's PSA Peugeot Citroen.

Said to be priced between RM60,000 and RM80,000, Waja comes with both automatic and manual transmissions as well as two engine options of 1.6 litre and 1.8 litre.

It should be available for bookings from this month and would be on domestic and foreign roads from September.

On whether the local suppliers are ready to receive orders once the Waja is launched in September, Kisai said all necessary arrangements are being made.

As of March this year, Proton has 185 vendors of which 88 are Bumiputeras,

manufacturing and supplying components for the company.

Kisai meanwhile pointed out that the facility in Shah Alam is also utilised to manufacture other national cars besides the Waja as it is equipped with the latest technology and equipment for automotive engineering, said to be the best in South-East Asia.

"It all depends on the demand (for Waja)," he said.

He said the 50,000 units per year is only the capacity of the facility and that Proton will definitely increase the figure should the market demand it.

Currently, the Proton plant in Shah Alam is able to produce 230,000 units a year.

Earlier, Kisai handed over 30 Proton cars to the Fire and Rescue Department to be used during the 21st International Fire Chief's Association of Asia General Meeting, Conference and Exhibition, to be held in Kuala Lumpur from August 6 to 8.

Receiving the cars was the Housing and Local Government Ministry secretary general Datuk Khalid Husin.

The 12 Proton Wira and 18 Proton Perdana V6 will be used as the official cars during the conference.