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PROTON-WAJA  
PROTON TO SHAKE COMPETITORS WITH WAJA

By: Mohd Arshi Daud

SHAH ALAM, May 8 (Bernama) -- In just over a year after shaking competitors with its engineering prowess via the Perdana V6 and Satria GTi, especially in terms of superior ride & handling capability, Proton is expected to make waves in the automotive world again with a totally new model called the Waja.

Developed with a RM970 million budget and 1.7 million engineering man-hours, the Waja was designed to compete with foreign names like the Audi A4, Opel Vectra, Honda Accord and Peugeot 406.

Waja, the first Malaysian-designed car, emerged from a challenge made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in April 1996 that Proton should design and produce its own car at affordable prices.

Named in a manner to reflect its "hard as steel" character, the Waja embodies a major milestone in engineering technology acquired by the first national car maker over its 15 years of existence.

"The Waja is twice as strong as any Proton car today. Its body rigidity is among the best in its class in the world," Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) chief executive officer Tengku Datuk Paduka Mahaleel Tengku Ariff said recently.

The body structure, created together with Lotus, has already met the 2003 European Crash Test Standards, he told a media briefing on Proton's achievements in the automobile industry, including developing its own engineering capability.

Tengku Mahaleel said the Waja's strong body is supplemented by two front airbags for the driver and front passenger, two side airbags for the back passengers and strengthened side impact beams.

In terms of engine and interior noise, the Waja "is better than the benchmark cars," he said.

The Waja was unveiled by Dr Mahathir at the Malawati Stadium here tonight in an event to celebrate Proton's major technological triumphs over a 15-year span.

As for road-handling, Proton is now able to offer pinpoint precision with inputs from its engineering subsidiary, Lotus.

Sales of the Waja is estimated at a conservative 40,000 to 50,000 units annually.

As for its price, Tengku Mahaleel promised it would be "competitive and within reach."

The price tag would be "so affordable and attractive" that Mahaleel foresees that it could even "cannibalise" some of the sales of the Proton Wira and Perdana.

The actual price has not been fixed as it is still being considered by the government.

Tengku Mahaleel is optimistic that the Waja's entire production would easily be absorbed by domestic purchasers.

The car, which is also targeted for export, has received numerous enquiries by Proton's overseas distributors, he added.

The Waja is available in engine options of 1.6 and 1.8 litres, either manual or automatic.

Tengku Mahaleel said the family-oriented Waja would appeal to the upper medium market.

Bookings will open from August while deliveries are expected to start the following month.--BERNAMA

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