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Mahathir-Lotus

PROTON TO COLLABORATE WITH LOTUS TO MANUFACTURE SPORTS CAR

By: Wan A. Hulaimi

HETHEL (Near Norwich), Oct 6 (Bernama) -- Proton will go into sports car manufacturing in its new Proton Malaysian Sports Car (MSC) project in collaboration with Lotus, the engineering group which Proton bought in October 1996.

The sports car, as yet unnamed but using the working description of Proton Ultimate, will be a two-seater constructed from a high-tech aluminium chassis and advanced composite body.

The announcement was made today during a visit by Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir.

The car project will benefit from Lotus' known expertise in lightweight engineering by having a lightweight, stiff and exceedingly safe structure, driven by an engine described in a Proton-Lotus release as "a class-leading high output engine".

Proton will work on the project with Lotus, a Proton subsidiary which also collaborated with Proton on the new Proton Waja.

Proton is spending RM600 million on new development, including a new Lotus wing which was opened by the prime minister, today.

During the visit, Dr Mahathir also unveiled a new Proton Small Engine (SENG) family project, the first for Proton in its 15-year history, to go into the design and development of its own petrol engine for mass production.

The new sports car, which Proton and Lotus are developing in the region of 200 bhp, will have acceleration power of 0-100 km/h in less than six seconds.

The body and chassis construction of the Proton Ultimate will be based on the technology originally used in the successful Lotus Elise, with the chassis built from bonded aluminium extrusions with body from advanced composites.

Lotus says that these technologies are being further explored and developed for the new Lotus supercar project M250 and the philosophy will be applied to the MSC.

The MSC will be built in Malaysia with volumes of up to 3,000 a year over a five-year period, and deriving cost-benefits from the existing Proton local supplier base.

It was learnt today that the car will be selling for less than RM200,000 and will be targeted for the Asean market.

"The engineering programme represents a significant step in the synergy and collaboration between Proton and Lotus engineering teams, a process that has already delivered Proton Satria Gti and Malaysia's newest car, the Waja.

"The joint team will conduct early concept design work in the UK to capitalise on Lotus technologies. Later, test, development and production work will be conducted in Malaysia utilising Proton's state of the art facilities," a joint Proton-Lotus release said today.

Proton chief executive Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff said that by employing Lotus' know-how and building on Proton's product development expertise, they would be able to produce this low-volume car at relatively low investment while still retaining high levels of technology which are key to Proton's core values.

Speaking at the unveiling of the new Proton's SENG engine, Tengku Mahaleel said the decision to acquire Lotus had paid off and since 1997 its revenue and employment had gone up.

Lotus Group CEO Datuk Chris Knight said that in the four years since the purchase of Lotus by Proton, buildings, staff, and investment had doubled.

He said the staff had doubled from 1100 to 2000, and earnings and profits had also more than doubled.

-- BERNAMA

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