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Proton to launch 'truly localised' car by this year

Eirmalasang Bani

PERUSAHAAN Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) plans to produce between 40,000 to 50,000 units annually of its "first truly localised" passenger car, its chief executive officer Tengku Datuk Mahaleel Tengku Ariff said.

He declined to say when the car will be launched, saying that "it will definitely be this year."

Sources said, however, that the soft launch of the car will be in May. "Orders can be placed in May and they will get their car three months later," the sources said.

It is understood the car will come in two variants, a 1.6 litre and a 1.8 litre. The 1.6 litre comes with a Renault engine while the 1.8 litre, a Mitsubishi.

It is also believed that Renault engineers have been in the country in the past one year to test the engine.

Mahaleel also refused to name the price of the new car, saying that "we will make it affordable". It is understood that the car will be priced "above the Wira but not more than the Perdana V6", which currently retails at about RM110,000 each.

Mahaleel was speaking to reporters after hosting International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and about 30 Members of Parliament and senators from Wanita Barisan Nasional at the Proton plant in Shah Alam yesterday.

Rafidah, who personally test drove the 1.8 litre car at Proton's test track, said: "I think it is a very good car. It will be our national pride ... the car is still being tested at the engineering stage but Proton has been able to incorporate the best characteristics for it.

"We have now reached the last stage of the automotive industry in Malaysia," she said.

It is understood that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad also test drove the new car earlier this year.

Meanwhile, Mahaleel said Proton had to stop operations of one of its plants in Shah Alam to undertake research and development of the new car.

Last year, Proton produced about 160,000 units.

"The local demand is very strong and we have almost reached maximum capacity for the Perdana and Iswara," he said.

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