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Waja to save nation RM900m a year: Dollah

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MALAYSIA will be able to save about RM900 million a year with the production of the new locally-designed Proton Waja car, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi says.

The savings will come from not having to import parts and accessories, or pay royalties for patents, he said.

National carmaker Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd (Proton) has been annually spending about RM405 million to import accessories and parts, and another RM500 million in royalty payments to the Japanese car manufacturer.

"If we have our own intellectual property rights to produce the chassis, we can produce new models in three or four years without having to pay extra costs for new developments," Abdullah said at the launching of Edaran Otomobil Nasional Bhd (EON) Proton Waja sales carnival in Shah Alam yesterday.

Proton has invested about RM970 million, 1.7 million man-hours and 300 engineers in three years to develop the Waja, its eighth model after the Proton Saga, Iswara, Wira, Satria, Putra, Tiara and Perdana. About 20 vendors are producing components for the Waja.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad unveiled the Proton Waja on May 8 2000. It is the first locally-designed car and is said to have met all the necessary regulations up to 2005, the year when all tariff barriers for the automotive sector in intra-Asean trade will be substantially lowered.

The Proton Waja is conceptualised as a competitive car for the new millennium, one that would do well in globally in a matured, dynamic and multi-cultural market.

The 1.6 litre variant of the Waja comes in four different colours (artic blue, silver, indium and petrol blue) and will be made available in both manual and automatic versions.

The Waja 1.6 manual with standard accessories will retail at RM58,963.30 (on the road price), while the 1.6 automatic version with standard accessories is priced at RM62,840.69 in Peninsular Malaysia.

The Proton Waja has five strong product features: stronger body, quality build with unique modular assembly, Lotus ride and handling, performance and higher class of safety.

Abdullah said the synergy and close cooperation between Proton and EON had ensured that the national car continues to be the top choice in Malaysia in terms of quality, competitive pricing and good after-sales service.

Beginning this month, EON no longer has exclusive distribution rights over new Proton models. The Proton Waja will be available at both EON and Usahama Proton-DRB Sdn Bhd (USPD) dealerships. This development follows Proton's recent acquisition of the entire stake in USPD.

Abdullah said EON must set up a responsive management team that can adapt to market changes before 2005, when tariff barriers for the automotive sector will be reduced under the Asean Free Trade Area.

The Association of South-East Asian Nations members had earlier decided to defer the tariff reductions for completely built-up and completely knocked-down products of the automotive industry from 2003 to 2005.

EON will display and sell the Proton Waja at all its 52 sales branch offices and 123 franchise sales dealers nationwide. EON chairman Tan Sri

Mohd Saleh Sulong said the Proton Waja 1.8 variant will be on sale early next year.

(END)