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Car importer set to make a mark

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WITH the German and Swedish strengths, a local car importer and distributor is set to become a big challenger to other companies selling premium brands such as BMW, Mercedes Benz and Ferrari.

Jaseri Auto Sdn Bhd, owned by Datuk Mokhzani Mahathir, has Germany's Porsche and Sweden's Saab marques to help it stamp a name in the domestic premium car market.

Jaseri is the country's exclusive importer and distributor of Porsche and Saab, which is wholly-owned by General Motors, the world's number one car manufacturer.

An extra boost to Jaseri Auto's charge seems imminent in the form of another global premium brand under the GM stable - the evergreen and proud American marque Cadillac.

GM director of luxury brands for Asia Pacific Peter Ruefli said the prospect of selling Cadillac in the country could probably be realised within six months.

"Cadillac is being strongly considered for future inclusion in our distribution channel for Malaysia."

Saying that the move is in line with GM's regional strategies to improve the representation and sales volume of its premium brands, Ruefli tipped that Cadillac's latest model, the CTS, could become the local debutant.

The left-hand version of the CTS would officially be launched at the Frankfurt Motor Show in September while the Tokyo Motor Show in October would be the launch pad for the model's right-hand version.

Signalling its serious bid to drive sales, Jaseri Auto has opened a RM4 million showroom and after-sales centre in Shah Alam to cope with busier times ahead as the company has been allowed to import 60 units of Porsche and 50 Saabs.

The Shah Alam facility, owned and operated by Jaseri Auto's wholly-owned subsidiary Auto Eurokars Sdn Bhd, was opened by the Regent of Selangor Tengku Idris Shah Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah on Tuesday.

Auto Eurokars has another showroom at Jalan Tun Razak in Kuala Lumpur.

Mokhzani, who is Jaseri Auto's chairman, said since appointed Porsche distributor last month, the company had sold six 911 Turbo and two Carrera GTs.

"Although the number of Porsche cars to be sold is quite a lot, we are confident of achieving the sales target," he told the Press before the launch of the RM4 million facility.

Mokhzani said that the sales target was based on a quota fixed by principal Porsche AG, determined partly after a strict study.

With Jaseri Auto's strong financial position and fairly good experience, Porsche, GM and Saab are expecting better days in Malaysia.

Porsche sales director Dr Andreas Offermann and Ruefli agreed that they have qualified and reliable partners in Jaseri Auto and Auto Eurokars which "understand their brands and speak the same language".

Offermann said Porsche's sales target in Malaysia for the fiscal year 2002, which starts in two weeks, are 50 to 60 units of Boxster and 911.

"Mid-term, we envisage, despite high import duties, a minimum of 100 units including the Cayenne. This might seem ambitious or over ambitious, but knowing the Cayenne, having driven it, I have no doubt at all at this objective."

Cayenne, a bigger SUV (sports utility vehicle) than BMW X5, Grand

Cherokee and Range Rover, is due for launch in the second half of 2002.

Porsche expects the Cayenne to boost the car maker's worldwide sales by another 50 per cent or 25,000 units within two years after the SUV's launch.

On Saab, Ruefli said: "Since we launched Saab 92 just over 50 years ago, we have really only launched seven new products with the latest being the remarkable Saab 9-5.

"Now, our plans call for us to launch another seven new products in the next five years."