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Let's not judge a book by its cover

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WHAT you drive says a lot about you.

At least, that is what you can expect from society that dwells a lot on material wealth where "getting ahead of the competition at any cost" is the rule of the game.

It was perfectly harmless, in fact Minister of International Trade and Industry Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz even made fun of the incident when she arrived at the new Mercedes-Benz showroom in Jalan Ampang only to have the security guard tell her she can't park her Proton Perdana there as they were expecting a VIP. It was actually her that they were expecting - in a VVIP car, perhaps a Mercedes-Benz?

The security guards were not to be blamed for they live in a society that has become embroiled in equating individuals with what they drive.

A businessman will tell you that if you want to do business and become successful, you have to drive a Mercedes-Benz - not a BMW, not a Volvo, a Mercedes-Benz no matter how old the car is!

It is commendable that the brand commands such a presence and respect from society but it's just sad that people nowadays take this at face value, so much so that social values become eroded.

This is what you call judging a book by it's cover, and this is what we have been taught and often reminded by others not to do.

Just because I drive a souped-up Wira doesn't make me a show-off, or even someone with a personality disorder. I take my work just as seriously as any other professional although this is what others may perceive when they don't know you.

Obviously, the Traffic Police and Road Transport Department enforcement officers will immediately write you off as a street racer, especially when they're carrying out their sting operations.

They're just looking at cars that fit the bill - irrespective of the driver and how he behaves on the road.

Drive a sportscar and you're not only labelled rich but you're more often than not categorised as a playboy. Not everyone - please!

I once met an individual who owned a Ferrari, a Porsche, a Nissan Skyline and a couple of other sportscar, but ask him what he drives to work and the answer is still a Mercedes-Benz. "You need to have it," was the explanation, to tell others you're genuine and successful. I am reminded of a car salesman I met who changes his cars on a daily basis just to impress the women. To those who didn't know, he was a businessman, in reality he was a salesman.

I also recall one NST photographer who visited a showroom many years ago arriving on a cub-chai and wearing slippers.

The car salesman had the cheek to tell him in not so many words that he couldn't afford the car when asked for a quotation. That was until he returned the following day and paid RM40,000 cash for the Proton. There are even individuals in the country who go shopping for a Ferrari in shorts and slippers carrying a bag full of cash!

And just listen to the tone of the on-going television advertisement campaign against "get rich quick" schemes. A guy arrives in a Mercedes-Benz and wear a Rolex and the kampung folks have no qualms parting with their life savings to invest with a stranger.

I remember a friend's father, a millionaire in his own right, who refused to be chauffeured around and prefers instead to ride a scooter to

work.

"Why bother getting stuck in the traffic jam when I can get there quicker with less hassle" was his rationale.

To a great extent, I applaud the Government's decision during the economic crisis to use Proton Perdana. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, I recall many years ago, used to arrive in a Lexus, but now he uses a Perdana or the latest Waja limousine.

Let this be a challenge to change the mindsets of the people and how they perceive the product as this will come a long way in AFTA. Right now - and you may challenge this if you must - it is the cheapest car in the market for the masses with the exception of Perdana of course.

So much so, even Rafidah mistakenly announced to her guests that day that she had arrived in a Proton Saga when it was actually a Proton Perdana V6, the top of Proton's range.

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