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BSA-F1

MALAYSIAN-MADE WHEELS TO COMPETE IN FORMULA ONE NEXT YEAR

By: Emillia Rosnizar

KUALA LUMPUR, July 7 (Bernama) -- Drivers...fasten your seat belts and get ready for this: BSA Manufacturing Sdn Bhd, a local maker of magnesium alloy wheels, is confident of landing a contract to supply them to at least one of the Formula One (F1) teams next year.

BSA or Bold, Stylishly Successful Automotive in the words of its group executive chairman, Datuk Dr Cam Soh Thiam Hong, has been talking to a few teams on the matter.

BSA's eventual entry into the competitive world of F1 follows the footsteps of Petronas about four years ago when it teamed up with Red Bull Sauber to enhance its branding and build up automotive engineering expertise among Malaysians.

Malaysia's significant involvement in F1, which has been inspired by Prime Minister Datuk Dr Mahathir Mohamad, will be enhanced further should local driver Alexander Yoong makes it to the starting grid later this year or early next year with Team European Minardi of Paul Stoddart.

Entering F1 may sound too ambitious for some people, but not Dr Cam who said it has always been BSA's dream to venture into F1, which he regards as the pinnacle of competitive racing in the automotive industry.

"Every automotive manufacturer is targeting F1 to prove their worth and quality. Even manufacturers of car polish," he told Bernama in an interview at his office in Rawang recently.

Targeting F1 is also part of BSA's five-year development plan, he said. BSA has four plants, two in Rawang, Selangor and two in Alor Gajah, Melaka.

To be able to supply magnesium alloy wheels to an F1 team would be another step forward for BSA and a giant leap for the Malaysian automotive industry, Dr Cam said.

BSA already had preliminary discussions with some F1 teams and the feedback had been positive, he said.

"We discussed with one team last year and this year the discussions are centred on dollars and cents," Dr Cam said.

However, he declined to identify which team would use BSA's wheels. "Wait till the next season," he said when pressed further for more definite directions. There will be 12 teams competing in the next season, the latest being the Matsushita-sponsored Toyota.

Dr Cam estimated that BSA would have to spend RM200,000 for just one race if it were to undertake the supply to F1.

"If we go for 20 races, we are going to spend RM4 million only on the wheels," he said hypothetically. There are 17 races in one F1 season.

Dr Cam said the total investment for supplying wheels to an F1 team is RM10 million, including all expenses.

To cater for the stringent specifications of F1 races, he said BSA would start producing magnesium alloy wheels by the end of this year.

"We can produce 12,000 pieces yearly, which means 3,000 sets in all," he explained.

Each F1 team needs about 2,000 sets in one season, including testing and practices.

"Our (magnesium alloy) production is mainly for F1 and we will have a balance only 1,000 sets," he added.

Dr Cam said Malaysia would be the the first South East Asian country to produce magnesium alloy wheels for F1 and the second in Asia after Japan.

He hoped that BSA's involvement in F1 would demonstrate that its

products are on par with other more famous brands.

For a start, he said BSA entered the motorsports industry in earnest by sponsoring a team in the Malaysian leg of Japan GT at Sepang recently.

Although the team did not make it to the podium, Dr Cam said the main objective was to prove that BSA rims could last the gruelling pace. And they did.

Motorsports aside, he disclosed that BSA sealed a one-year contract to supply aluminium alloy wheels for use in the KIA Spectra.

The company started supplying from May this year to a plant in Pekan which assembles KIA vehicles.

"We are supplying 1,000 pieces a month at a value of RM150,000," Dr Cam said.

When asked about Proton, he said BSA hoped to supply wheels for the Perdana V6 by November or February next year at the latest.

Proton, he said, has asked BSA to produce 20,000 pieces of aluminium alloy wheels each month V6 at a contract value of RM2.4-RM2.5 million. --

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