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PROTON-MODELS

VARIOUS PROTON MODELS COMING UP IN NEXT 3-4 YRS, SAID MAHALEEL

KUALA LUMPUR, July 21 (Bernama) -- Proton will mix affordable cars with exciting and niche models in the range of vehicles that it would introduced in the next three to four years, said Proton chief executive officer Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff today.

"We have announced a sports car in cooperation with Lotus and a niche model made from aluminium-type structure," he said after the launch of Proton's 11th model, the Juara, by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, here.

At the same time, Proton (Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Bhd) would remodelled its current cars, including the 17-year old Iswara.

"There are a lot of works currently being done on high-performance and niche models as well as in refreshing the basic Proton models," said Tengku Mahaleel.

He also said that Proton is committed to introduce at least one new model a year but whether a second one would be offered this year depends on its ability to meet testing requirements and quality standards.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir, who was also present at the press conference said: "I have seen some of the new models. They are worth waiting for."

The Prime Minister also gave his thumbs up for the Juara, which is a mini-multi purpose vehicle (MPV).

He said the Juara is a unique model that meet the lifestyle of the young, family and business users.

The ride and handling is good given its Lotus input, he added.

The 1.1 litre automatic MPV is priced at RM49,203.63 (inclusive of standard accesories).

Tengku Mahaleel said that some five to six thousand units of the new model is expected to be sold this year following which a target of 10,000 units has been set annually.

"But we suspect sales will be like (the much sought-after) Waja model. We are a bit worried (on the supply side)."

To a question, Tengku Mahaleel said the Juara would only be distributed by its wholly-owned subsidiary, Proton Edar Sdn Bhd.

"Proton Edar is the only one who have signed distributive agreement with us but Edaran Otomobil Nasional Bhd (EON) had not done so," he said.

He also disclosed that Proton would export the Juara in two to three years time after a re-engineering of the model is completed.

Tengku Mahaleel said the Juara has only gone through a cosmetic change and improvement in road and handling aspects compared with the original model borrowed from its technology partner Mitsubishi.

On another note, he said Proton and Mitsubishi are still in discussion for the latter to "take" the Mitsubishi models that have been re-engineered by Proton. -- BERNAMA

MAD MKO