

Petronas plans to commercialise Sauber engines

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By SA'ODAH ELIAS in Hinwil, Switzerland

PETRONAS plans to commercialise its 1.8litre- and 2.2litre -car engines fine-tuned from the prototype engine designed and developed at its Sauber Petronas Engineering facilities in Hinwil, Switzerland as early as 2004.

Its chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainul Abidin said Petronas was currently engaged in talks with Proton to have the engines used in its cars, or at the very least, in one of its models.

"We are interested to have the engines used by Proton. The engines have proven to be a success when first tested in the last F1 race in Sepang.

"The cars using the Sauber engine ended up being used by the marshals at the race," Azizan told Malaysian reporters after accompanying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad on a visit to the plant yesterday.

The engine, he said, was state-of-the-art and had passed with flying colours in the tests for performance and durability.

Azizan said while Petronas was also interested in marketing the engine in the international markets, it believed that Proton was the best partner to introduce the engine.

He said the initial investment in the collaboration with Sauber was US\$10mil but Petronas was still looking at the figures required for the commercialisation of the engines.

Asked whether Petronas would plan to produce its own cars, Azizan said that was not featured in the company's future plan as it was more interested in helping Malaysia improve its technological capability in engine designing and development.

"As of now, we have 16 Malaysian engineers involved in every aspect of engine designing and development here. We want more Malaysian born and bred engineers to be involved in this venture in the future.

"Our vision is to help Malaysia emerge as a force in the global automotive industry as it is imperative for Malaysia to be able to move up the ladder of technology," added Azizan.

Petronas's joint venture unit with Sauber Engineering of Switzerland, called Sauber Petronas Engineering AG, started in 1998 as a mere image and branding exercise, but the collaboration had since developed into something more tangible for both parties, Azizan said.