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Petronas team comes up with new engine

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IN a major step forward for Malaysian automotive engineering, a team of 16 young Malaysian engineers with Petronas has designed a "compact, sporty and powerful" car engine that will be ready for commercial use in 2004.

Petronas chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainal Abidin said here yesterday that Petronas, already associated worldwide with Formula One racing, hoped to have national car-maker Proton feature the engine in at least one of its new models.

"We have charted a milestone in this," said Azizan.

"We have proven our capability in developing a commercial engine that is competitive for cars."

Azizan is a member of the delegation of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in Switzerland on a three-day visit. Dr Mahathir visited Petronas Sauber in Hinwill, near here, yesterday.

Azizan said the engine had been tested for "roadability". Spurred by this success, Petronas hopes to produce a family of engines of 1.8-litre to 2.2-litre capacities.

"With this engine, we can develop and construct engines to meet various models of cars," he said.

Azizan paid tribute to the engineering team, based in Hinwill, who were responsible for this success. Having begun with a prototype in 1998, Azizan said they had proven Malaysia's high-tech capability.

Dr Mahathir also met the 16 "passionate young Malaysians" who were assigned to the engine design, development and testing project.

The engine has been tested in marshall cars for F1 Sepang, as well as in Proton's Perdana and Waja models. "We are no longer at the low end of high-tech," Azizan said.

"We are moving up the ladder of technology. We have to build on a foundation in engineering capability.

"This engine is our product, our capability and our expertise. We are very proud of this."

Petronas chairman Tan Sri Azizan Zainal Abidin said the world should know that "Petronas is not just about drilling wells for oil".

He said the country's proven capability in high-technology should encourage direct investment in such projects as Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor, where a conducive technical environment had been created.

"Others will see our capability as a basis for investment."

Azizan could not specify the cost of bringing the new engine into commercial production, but noted that it would be considerably higher than the initial US\$10 million (RM38 million) investment in developing the engine.

"Commercialisation will always cost much more. We must make sure that it is viable. Cost must be as low as possible without compromising performance. We have to set our target, source equipment and choose the right materials so we can produce a competitive, state-of-the-art engine," he said.

Petronas' involvement with Formula One began in 1995 as an initial branding exercise with Sauber.

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