

08/06/2005

PROTON-SAVVY

PROTON TO RECAPTURE LOCAL SMALL CAR SEGMENT WITH SAVVY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 8 (Bernama) -- National car manufacturer Proton Holdings Bhd plans to recapture the local small car segment with the introduction of the new 1.2 litre Savvy hatchback here today.

Its group chief executive officer, Tengku Tan Sri Mahaleel Tengku Ariff, said Proton aimed to pluck a fair share from the segment, saying that the company had been "neglecting the small car segment for quite a long time and allowing others to come in."

The Savvy would open a new chapter for Proton, which was hoping to make its presence felt again in the increasingly competitive small car market, he said.

Proton launched the 1.1 litre five door hatchback Tiara in 1996 based on Citroen AX but it failed to make a strong impact locally.

The Savvy, the new replacement model for the Tiara and codenamed TRM until now, was launched here today by Proton adviser and former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The Savvy, another of Proton's new generation model, is a five-door compact hatchback powered by a 1.2 litre engine with a maximum speed of 170km/h.

Tengku Mahaleel said the market for the Savvy would depend on Proton's current production capacity currently standing at a maximum of 2,000 units per month.

On a more conservative note, he said the national car manufacturer was targeting less than 20 percent of the local small car segment, which now stood at 150,000 units annually.

"This much we can serve because of production capacity...if demand becomes stronger we can (grab) up to as high as 30 percent, but we have to invest further for our plant," he told reporters at a media preview of the Savvy Tuesday.

Introduced to further liven up the local small car segment despite its already crowded field with an assortment of other makes, Proton officials have high hopes for the Savvy to capture even a higher share market.

"Our ambition has always been to reach 40 percent (of the total market share)," he said.

The Savvy is currently available in a five-speed manual transmission but Proton intends to introduce a variant fitted with the state-of-the-art automated-manual transmission (AMT) at a later stage.

The AMT transmission is currently undergoing the final stages of endurance testing for use in Malaysia.

It would only be launched once the system had been fully tested and acclimatised to ensure all aspects of customer satisfaction, Tengku Mahaleel explained.

He said Proton would like a customer to think of the Savvy as "My First Lotus".

He added the theme or design philosophy of the Savvy would give car buyers something to aspire to and to one day own a performance or sports car like the Lotus.

"That was certainly the design ideology from the start of the project. We wanted a small car that offers practicality, fuel economy, generous space and great all round performance.

"It is not a sports car nor does it look like a Lotus but certain elements have been engineered into the car that will give you a taste of

what it is like to drive one of the world's best handling vehicles," he added.

Asked on Proton's next new generation model, the SRM or Satria Replacement Model, Tengku Mahaleel said it would not be wise for the company to introduce another new model just after it had launched one.

"We need at least three months or so for the Savvy to mark its presence in the market," he said.

The local motor market is expecting Proton to introduce the SRM by year end. -- BERNAMA

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