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Abdullah leads vintage motorcade

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MALACCA: It was a flashback from the past. A Nash Rambler Custom Convertible 1951 leading a motorcade, bicycles, people waving flags and dressed in clothes of the 1950s.

The thousands who had gathered at Dataran Merdeka went on a nostalgic trip to the time when the late Tunku Abdul Rahman arrived in Malacca on Jan 20, 1956, from England after successfully negotiating the country's independence.

Malacca was where the first prime minister announced the country's independence.

Yesterday, it was Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi who helped capture the images 51 years ago by leading a motorcade from Renaissance Hotel to Dataran Pahlawan in the Merdeka car, a Nash Rambler Custom Convertible 1951.

A similar model was ridden by Tunku 51 years ago and the vehicle which carried Abdullah bore the same registration number — M4442.

The car also carried Chief Minister Datuk Seri Mohd Ali Rustam and Culture Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Rais Yatim.

As the motorcade pulled into Dataran Pahlawan (previously known as Padang Merdeka), tens of thousands of people clapped and cheered and some were swept by a sense of déjà vu.

Abdullah then launched the 50th Merdeka Celebration and the Fly the Jalur Gemilang campaign.

Four old bicycles and white banners which read: "Di atas runtuhan Kota Melaka kita dirikan negara baru" (Over the ruins of the Malacca fort, we built a new country) and "Merdeka we are free, Loyalty to Malaya" greeted

Abdullah.

Upon Abdullah's arrival, the crowd, waved their mini Jalur Gemilang and sang *Negaraku*.

Abdullah, dressed in a bright red baju melayu, then signed the 50th Declaration of Independence document and received the kris from independence veteran, Datuk Fatimah Ahmad.

Later, 50 veterans were given medals for their struggles in helping the nation achieve its independence.

Gracing the event was the Malacca Yang Dipertua Negeri Tun Mohd Khalil Yaakob.