

Sleepless nights finally

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Merdeka Car arrives and serves its

Registered: Dr Rais placing the number plate showing M4442 on the car.



Malaysiaku Gemilang

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Photos by AZMAN GHANI and
courtesy of **NATIONAL ARCHIVE**
and **MERDEKA PRESS**
SECRETARIAT

THE sleepless nights were not over yet for National Archive director-general Sidek Jamil even when the Merdeka Car arrived at the MAS Cargo terminal, Kuala Lumpur International Airport at 5.30pm on Monday.

It took 17 days for the Nash Rambler Custom Convertible 1951 to be transported into the country from the United States. It is the same model that the first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra rode on Feb 20, 1956 to Padang Bandar Hilir in Malacca where he announced the date of the country's independence after he returned from London.

Founding fathers Tun Tan Cheng Lock and Datuk Panglima Bukit Gantang Toh Muda Haji Abdul Wahab Abdul Aziz were also in the car believed to be owned by an individual from Malacca who volunteered to ferry them to the crowd of 100,000 people.

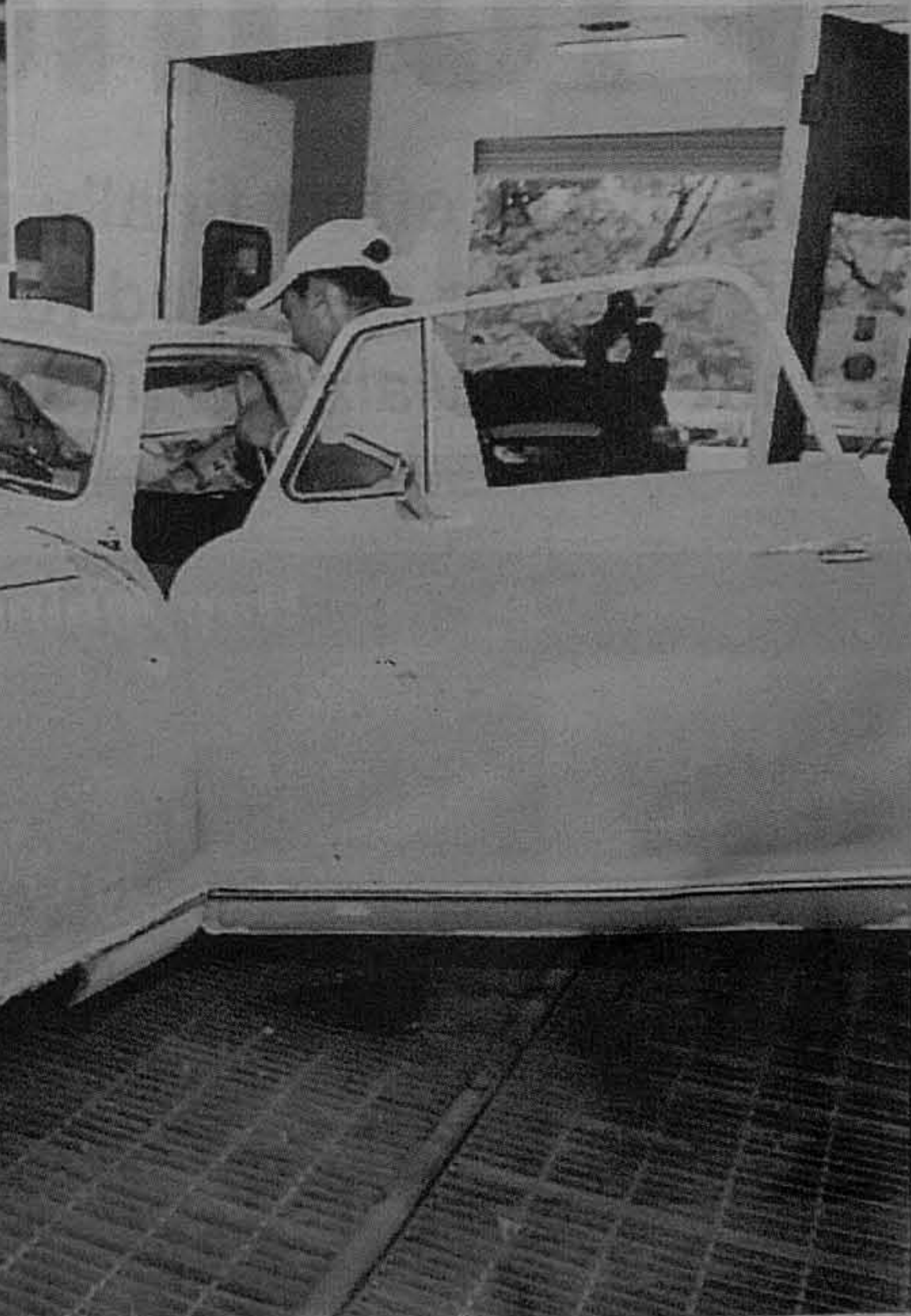
"The search started in 2003. We first checked with JPJ and discovered that there was no car with the plate number M4442, so the car that was used to send Tunku to the field should no longer be in existence. We are still trying to trace the owner of that car.

"The next best thing we could do was to look for the same model. It was equally challenging. The Internet

The Merdeka Car glided gracefully into national attention at the grand launch of Merdeka celebrations yesterday, belying the painstaking process of searching, acquiring and transporting the Nash Rambler Custom Convertible 1951. National Archive director-general Sidek Jamil told *StarMetro* the story behind the scenes.



Colour change:
When it arrived, the car was green in colour.



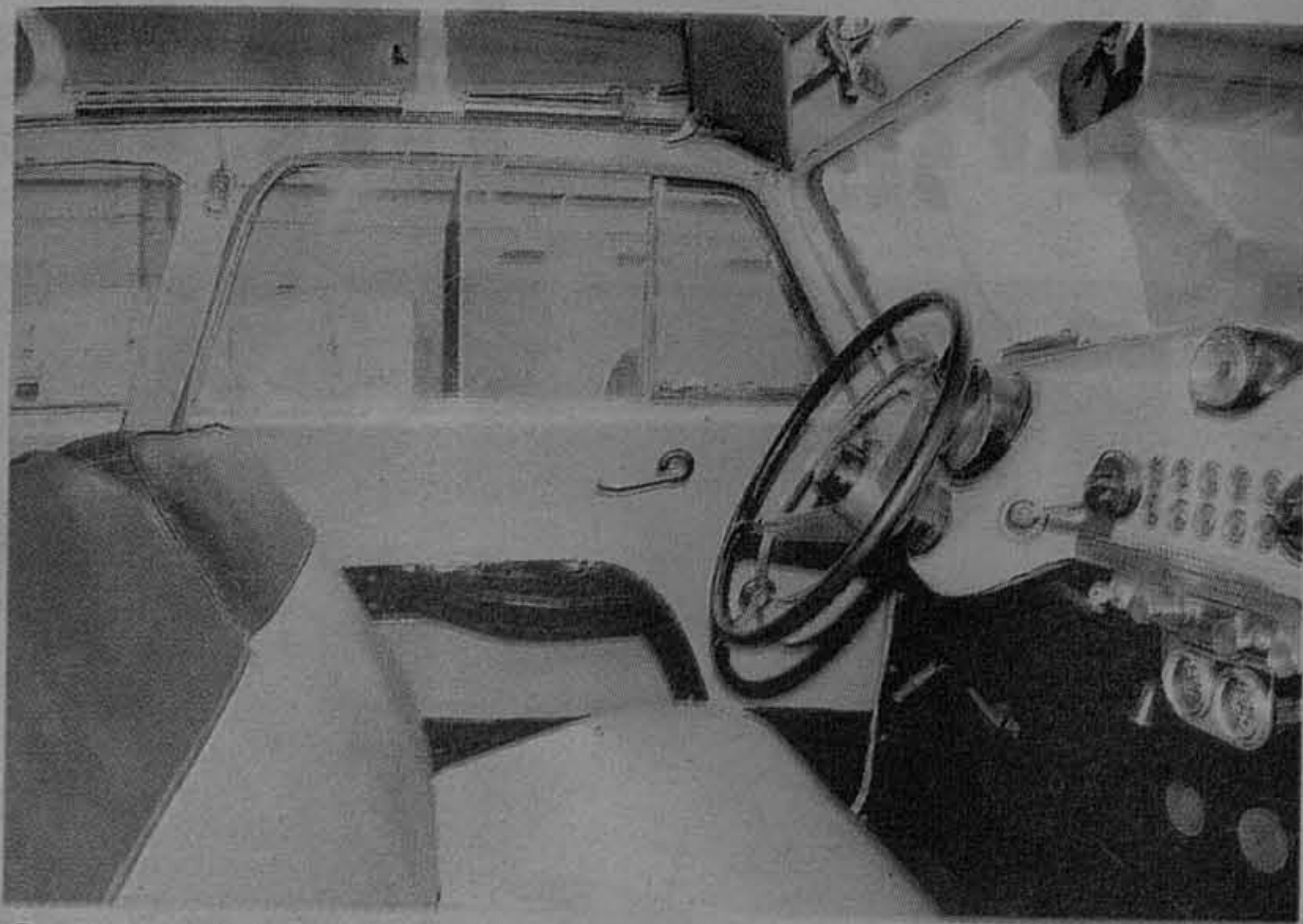
Paint job: A worker carefully puts the finishing touches to the Nash Rambler Custom Convertible 1951.

over for D-G

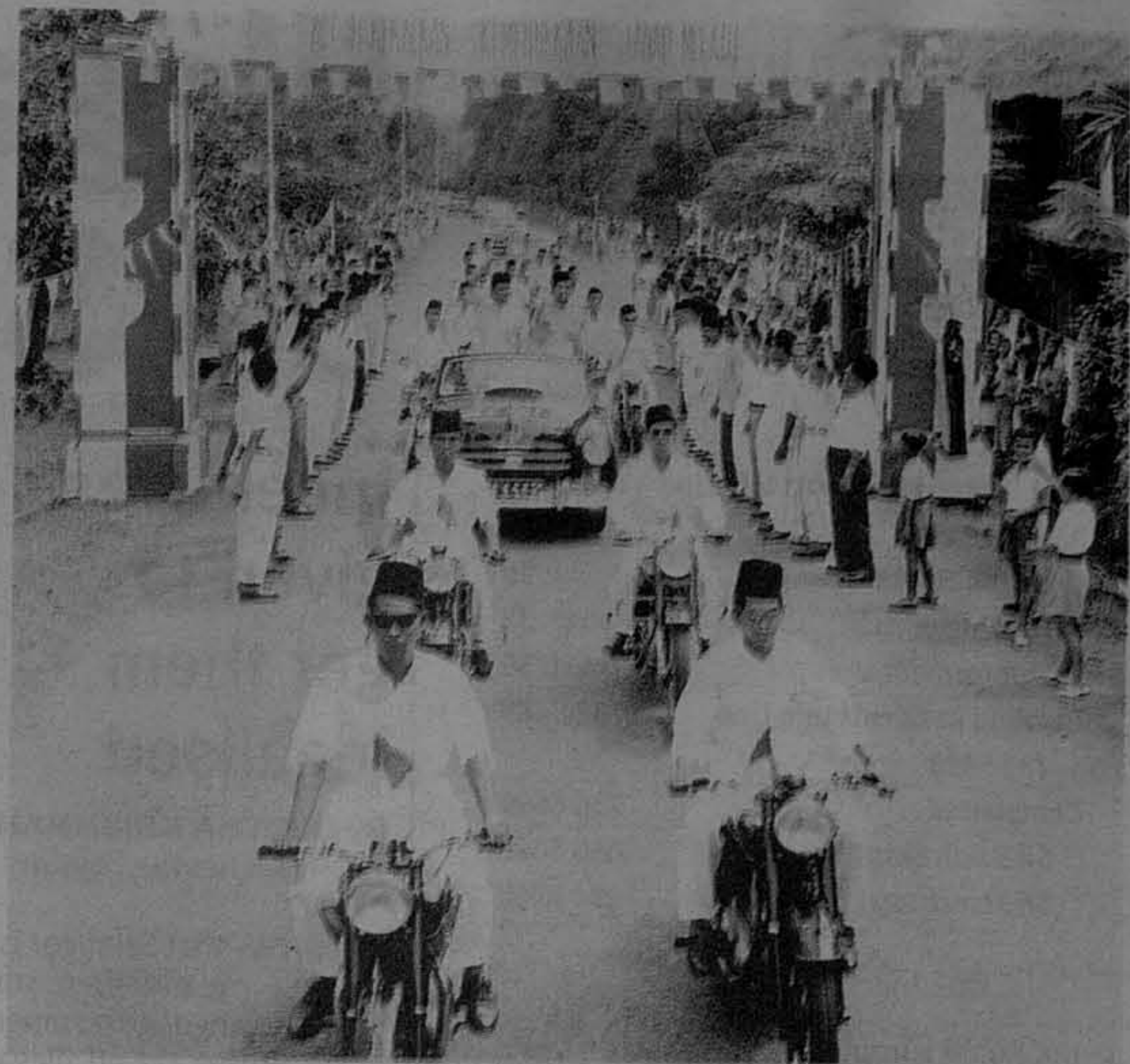
purpose well

»I would have butterflies in my stomach whenever it was stranded somewhere for inspections«

SIDEK JAMIL



Open top: A look into the interior of the convertible.



All the way: The convoy that accompanied Tunku Abdul Rahman on his way to Padang Bandar Hilir in 1957.

searches found no hits, not even at sites of used car dealers abroad.

"All we got was that Istana Budaya had a replica that was used for one of its musicals, but we need a real car to send our ministers to the square," said Sidek in an exclusive interview.

Tasked with bringing in the car to re-enact the historical moment, the National Archive revved up the search in May.

Beacons of hope were finally in sight when the team found Faroib Enterprise, whose owners are staunch fans of antique cars. The company has been active in the motoring business, especially with antique cars, at home and abroad.

In the meantime, National Archive carried out meticulous authentication efforts, such as consulting antique car experts and referring to old photographs.

In the end, the frantic global search found only two cars of such a model. One in Australia had just been sold, and they immediately booked the other found at Motorcar Portfolio Enterprise in Ohio, the United States.

"After scrutinising the photographs, we were still worried whether the engine was in working condition. The seller assured us, saying 'it can start, can run, can

stop,'" said Sidek with a laugh.

"In the beginning, the company turned us down as the model was still very much in demand after it was featured in the Superman TV series as the car driven by Lois Lane," he added.

Since then, the deal was sealed at US\$30,000, the car had to go through a seven-day dangerous goods inspection in the US, and had to be routed through Detroit, Chicago, Anchorage (Alaska), Tokyo and the Philippines where sales documents were repeatedly verified and customs checks were done thoroughly.

"I glued my eyes to the computer

screen till late at night. The agents sent me emails about the car's whereabouts and I would have butterflies in my stomach whenever it was stranded somewhere for inspections.

"I was so traumatised. I could only wait for news from the Internet, it was like working in space," said Sidek.

"It was not about getting something for several customers, but for a nation of some 25mil people! I was really under a lot of pressure. If you can't deliver, where can you put

your face?" he added.

Here, various parties including the Prime Minister's Department, Finance Ministry, International Trade and Industry Ministry, Foreign Affairs Ministry, Malaysian Embassy in Washington DC, Malaysian Customs, Road Transport Department (Putrajaya and Malacca), MASCargo, Malaysia Airports Bhd and Malaysia Airline System were involved in the process.

"I was still a bundle of nerves when the car landed at the MASCargo terminal. All this while, we had seen only the photographs, I wasn't sure if the real thing was what we expected and I didn't know if it could run like what was promised," he said.

Sidek could finally heave sighs of relief when the car was brought to Faroib Enterprise's workshop in Klang. Only necessary touch ups took place due to time constraints, and the car was repainted from green to black to resemble the one Tunku rode in.

"The mechanics worked round the clock to get the car ready. Luckily, the car was in good condition, even the radio antenna was still in tact.

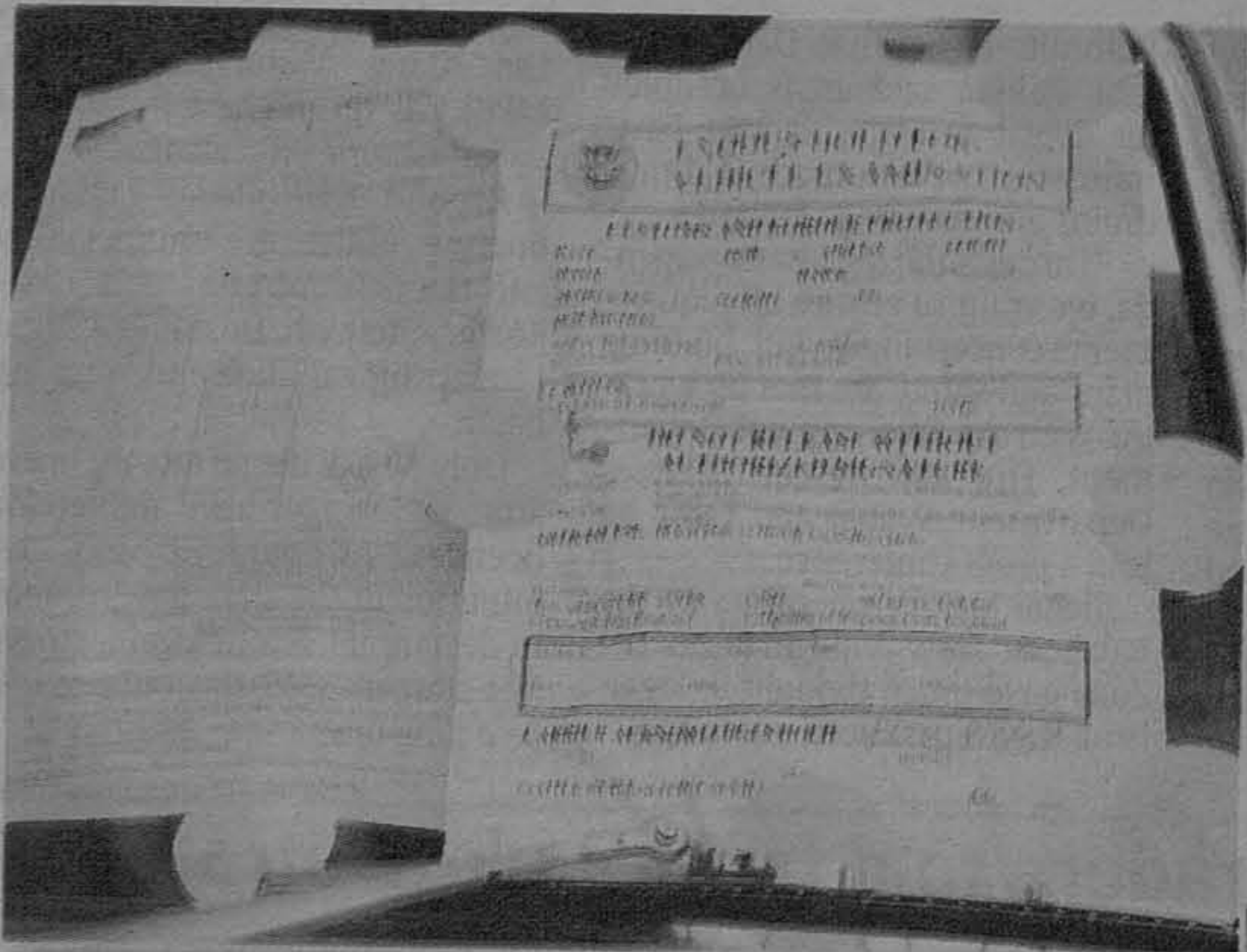
"All in all, the acquiring process costs RM171,975. The agent charged only a minimal amount for all the works involved, to them this is their contribution to the country," he added.

The icing on the cake is that the car gets the same registration number. The resurrected M4442 now has its own historical significance for carrying Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, Malacca Chief Minister Datuk Seri Wira Ali Rustam and Culture, Arts and Heritage Minister Datuk Seri Utama Dr Rais Yatim from Hotel Renaissance to Dataran Pahlawan at the grand launch of Merdeka celebrations yesterday in Malacca.

The car is expected to make its public appearance again on Independence Day. After the ceremonies, the car will be restored and the government will then decide on where to store it.

Suggestions are already aplenty, among them is to bring it on nationwide roadshows so that more Malaysians can feast their eyes on the memorable antique.

Having completed this task, Sidek received a new proposal - to put an engine into the car currently on display at the entrance of Tunku's memorial, which he used during his tenure as the Prime Minister, so that it can be driven into the limelight again at next year's Merdeka celebrations.



Tedious: Some of the many documents required as the car made its way to Malaysia.



Well-preserved: The interior of the car shows that it is in good condition despite its age.



All geared up: The car has been repainted black and is all set for its part in the festivities.

Restorasi
Kustom
Konvertible 1957