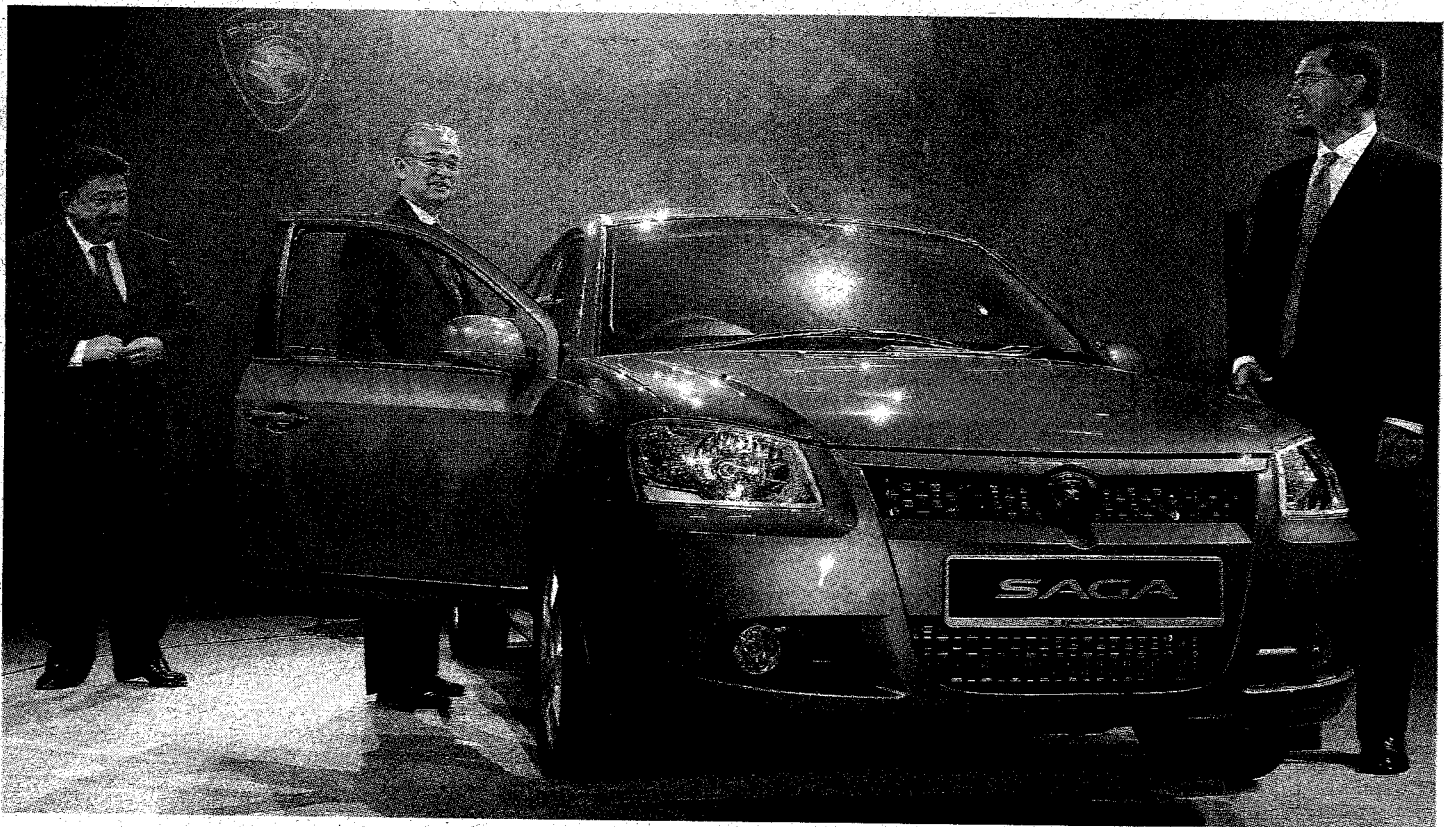


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New Saga 'will be the people's pride and joy'

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Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi taking a closer look at the Proton Saga. With him are Proton Holdings Berhad chairman Datuk Mohamed Azlan Hashim (left) and managing director Datuk Syed Zainal Abidin Syed Mohamed Tahir. — NST picture by Abd Rahim Rahmat

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KUALA LUMPUR: The new Proton Saga model will be a worthy successor to the iconic first Malaysian car, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

"It will become the people's car, as well as the people's pride and joy. I am sure that it will live up to the standards and expectations set by the Saga," Abdullah said at the lavish launch of the new 1.3-litre, four-door family sedan yesterday at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre.

He said the new Saga reflected national car maker Proton Holdings Berhad's continuous efforts towards becoming a full fledged and globally competitive automotive manufacturer.

The prime minister spoke with pride of Proton's many achievements, saying that "our national cars are on the roads of more than 40 countries".

He also said Proton was the catalyst for the development of human capital and talent in the automotive industry.

However, it was critical that Malaysia's car manufacturers responded to the increasingly challenging environment of the global industry, which was going through a consolidation phase, dictated by the need for greater economies of scale for survival and sustainability.

"I am pleased that Proton has paid heed to this, taking concrete steps to reorganise and restructure its operations towards becoming more competitive and efficient."

He cited the Proton Persona and the new Saga as models that were developed with significantly reduced development costs.

The prime minister recalled the first Saga produced by Proton in 1985.

"The first Saga fulfilled our dream of having a car which we could call Malaysian," he said, adding that the Saga had become a national emblem with about 1.2 million units sold.

Saying that Proton had come full circle with the new model, Abdullah tipped the new Saga to scale even greater heights, as it was developed not only with domestic sales in mind but also the export market.

Abdullah congratulated the whole Proton Holdings Berhad team, from chairman Datuk Mohamed Azlan Hashim and managing director Datuk Syed Zainal Abidin Syed Mohamed Tahir to the workers on the factory floor.

He said the company had gone through various phases in its industry struggle.

"It was first a story of success, later on of pain and even shame. Today, it is surmounting challenges to triumph once more."

He praised Proton's feat of completing the development of the new model in 17 months, carried out within the targeted time line and budget.

Abdullah also highlighted the utilisation of new technology in the model, saying that Proton had amply rewarded Malaysians with a car they truly deserved.

"This is a car that offers a simple and contemporary design which combines functionality and practicality, and yet is available at an affordable price range."

The new Saga is the 16th model for Proton since the first Saga came out 23 years ago in 1985.

In his speech, Azlan said the new sedan was priced from as low as RM29,999, excluding road tax, insurance, extended warranty, registration and other administrative fees.