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Proton adviser Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has Proton executive chairman Datuk Seri Mohd Khamil Jamil in stitches upon receiving a souvenir after launching Lotus' first ever showroom here. Pic by Chan Wai Yew

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Proton to steer Lotus back to the black in two years

ZAIDI ISHAM ISMAIL

KUALA LUMPUR: Proton Holdings Bhd aims to turn its loss-making sports car unit Group Lotus plc back to profitability in two years' time.

Lotus, which is wholly-owned by Proton, was acquired by the latter 17 years ago but has been making losses for the past 15 years.

In 2009 alone, the Norfolk-based sports carmaker turned in a loss of £14.6 million (RM72 million).

Proton in turn is a wholly-owned unit of DRB-HICOM Bhd. The latter bought an initial 42.7 per cent stake from government-owned investment arm Khazanah Nasional Bhd for RM1.3 billion last January.

Proton executive chairman Datuk Seri Mohd Khamil Jamil said the current Proton management line-up is going all out to whip Lotus back into shape. This includes instilling a

new management culture and rationalising its 140 Lotus showrooms worldwide as well as 30 Proton showrooms nationwide.

"We are going all out to revive Lotus such as enhancing standards and revitalising the brand in an increasingly competitive market.

"It's not easy but Inshaallah (God willing) the management will come up with innovative and forthcoming measures to make Lotus sustainable," said Mohd Khamil, who is also DRB-HICOM group managing director.

He had earlier accompanied former prime minister and Proton adviser Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad to launch Lotus' first ever RM7 million showroom here yesterday.

"It will be a herculean task to turn Lotus around, but I believe that DRB-HICOM can do it by changing the management culture of the staff

and make a statement to the world that this is a new Proton and a new Lotus," Dr Mahathir said.

Mohd Khamil said Lotus' future looks bright as the British marquee had delivered 12 units in Malaysia with another 20 back orders.

Lotus aims to sell a total of 200 units a year here and up to 4,000 units worldwide.

Meanwhile, Dr Mahathir, who also launched the Lotus Exige S and Elise S, said there should be no more talk of Proton selling off Lotus.

It is a respected car in the racing world and the sports car industry, he added.

There is also demand for Lotus and Proton cars in Malaysia and worldwide and DRB-HICOM can produce good, affordable and good quality Lotus and Proton cars in Malaysia and the world market, Dr Mahathir said.