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COME month's end, Malaysians will stand united to celebrate Merdeka with pride.

Looking back on 57 years of independence, Malaysia has accomplished so many wonderful achievements which have made us all citizens proud, steadily paving the way towards achieving Vision 2020.

One of the most significant events to have put Malaysia on the international scene is the development of the national automotive industry following the introduction of the first national car, the Proton Saga.

History of the Proton Saga says that the name was coined by a soldier, Ismail Jaafar, then 29 years old, who claimed that "Saga" is an acronym for "safety, achievement, greatness, ability". Without doubt, the Proton Saga had proven that Malaysia was capable of building its own national car.

What started out as an idea by former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is now the chairman of PROTON Holdings Bhd (PROTON), developed into the earliest unit of the Proton Saga in September 1985.

This was of course made possible with technical support and expertise from Mitsubishi Corp and Mitsubishi Motor Corp Japan as well as the Heavy Industries Corporation of Malaysia Berhad (HICOM), which has since merged with Diversified Resources Bhd (DRB) to form DRB-HICOM.

The journey of the Proton Saga

Malaysia made history when two units of the Proton Saga were launched worldwide through a marketing programme called "Sagarama".

Then, wherever the Proton Saga was presented to the public, be it in the city or village, people flocked to catch a glimpse of what is now the pride of our country. Just so quickly, the Proton Saga became a hit.

At that time, many could not afford their own car but things changed for the better when the first generation Proton Saga was launched at a price of RM20,000.

At such a low, affordable price coupled with endless support for its performance, the Proton Saga made it to the top of the Malaysian passenger vehicle list.

As sales were very encouraging,



Stamp in commemoration of the Proton Saga.

Birth of Proton Saga

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The model has a history of 57 years of engineering expertise



An historic occasion — former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad launching the Proton Saga in 1985.

buyers did not need to be on an order list.

In the beginning, Proton's logo was a blue shield with a crescent moon placed below a yellow 14-pointed star with almost 80 per cent reference to Mitsubishi. As the brand grew, however, it was able to come up with its own design made from scratch.

PROTON, up to this day, is a champion in its own league. Indeed, the brand is one of the sources of pride to our multiracial country.

At the same time, with the establishment of PROTON, huge employment opportunities were available for fresh-faced Malaysians and all at once, this put their engineering and design expertise to the test.

Based on the needs and wants of the market, the first generation Proton Saga has now evolved with the launch of the Saga BLM and Saga SV



The Proton Saga traversing the Penang Bridge.

in 2008 and 2013 respectively.

The launches were parallel to the government's objective of providing Malaysians with a vehicle that is not only spacious and user-friendly but affordable as well.

Various technological and safety advancements have been made at no additional cost to the Proton Saga to heighten its stability and provide customers with greater user gratification.

Besides its impressive interiors and exterior designs, the two latest generations of Proton Saga come with additional features, offering better comfort, credibility and security.

Furthermore, the low maintenance cost and enhanced aftersales services are what make all three generations of the Proton Saga the preferred choices of existing and prospective buyers.

For instance, the Proton Saga BLM is a gem among other variants despite its simple design as it offers

not only a dynamic driving experience but practical features and accessories at a minimal purchase price and consumption costs.

Likewise, the Proton Saga SV offers better value for money as it carries an entry level price from RM33,348, hence, coming in as the cheapest B-segment vehicle in the region.

3-star rating

Although the Proton Saga SV is a cut-price dig as opposed to its other counterparts, it has been given a 3-star rating by the ASEAN New Car Assessment Program (NCAP) based on its specifications and this does not rule out its notable safety features which include the incorporation of two front airbags and "pretensioner" safety belts.

The pride of Malaysia and its automotive industry has come a long way to become a national car manufacturer since its first opera-



The current generation Proton Saga.

tion some three decades ago. The marque has thus far contributed significantly to the growth of Malaysia's vehicle component manufacturing industry and has also proven the effectiveness of the country's industrial and national automotive policies.

Thanks to the support and solid commitment from its customers, business associates, shareholders, government agencies as well as its employees, PROTON has propelled the country to grow into a world-renowned vehicle manufacturer.

From its first production back in 1985, Proton has managed to sell over 1.5 million units of the Proton Saga as at today.

It can be said that PROTON has achieved tremendous success in creating consumer products of great quality, like its innovative yet affordable passenger vehicles.

With that, in conjunction with Malaysia's 57th Independence Day, PROTON's showrooms will have great offers up for grab. Visit the showrooms to test drive the new Proton model and feel the one-of-a-kind driving pleasure that PROTON has to offer.

Happy 57th Independence Day, Malaysia.