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Electric car likely to be priced from RM28,000 to RM35,000

Rashid Yusof in London

THE price of the electric car to be manufactured in Malaysia from next year is likely to be within the range of the Perodua Kancil (about RM28,000 to RM35,000).

The car, to be manufactured by Perusahaan Otomobil Elektrik Malaysia, a joint venture company with Tenaga Nasional as its majority shareholder, is said to be suitable for city use.

Tenaga executive chairman Datuk Dr Ahmad Tajudin Ali, who is also chairman of Poem, said the vehicle, known as the "city car", did not produce emission, was silent and would never have to go for refills at the petrol station.

The car needs recharging after about 120km. Ahmad Tajudin said with advancements in battery technology, recharging could be done within an hour.

Since no external outlay is required, recharging could be done for instance when one parks his car while shopping.

Ahmad Tajudin said the electric car required further restyling, refinement and subsequent trials. This was why Poem believed its manufacture could only start by next year.

He said the intention was not to compete with Proton or similar cars, but to complement the family cars.

The driving experience is the same and, like automatic cars, there are no gears and the gear change is not felt.

The two plus two seater, uses digital differential technology. Since it does not use petrol and contains less moving parts than ordinary cars, cost of maintenance is low.

Ahmad Tajudin said the electric motorcycle was equally exciting and was suitable, among others, for fixed routes as in the work of postmen.

It too requires fine-tuning and is likely to be comparable in price to the national motorcycle.

Ahmad Tajudin said the Government had been very supportive of the project, which is also participated by Datuk Mohd Nadzmi Mohd Salleh's Composite Automotive Research and Tan Sri Basir Ismail as an individual.

"We need Nadzmi for all his experience in the car industry, while Tan Sri Basir's interest is to bring the technology to the country," said Ahmad Tajudin.

Early production at Poem's temporary plant at one of the buildings of Universiti Tenaga Malaysia in Bangi would concentrate on "solar baby" - for use at airports and resorts - the golf buggy and kart. The plant will begin with 30 to 40 employees.

Nadzmi said since the electric vehicles were new, prices must not be prohibitive.

"We have to start on a smaller scale. We will have to get the product right and we have to satisfy the customers' demands. It is going to be definitely a niche," he said.

A lot of parts in the city car could be sourced from components of cars in the same range. There are also incentives under Earth Summit, Agenda 21.

Poem is also looking at exporting the electric vehicles.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who visited Frazer-Nash's research and development centre in Surrey on Thursday, was also briefed by Frazer-Nash chairman Kamal Sidiqqi on a variety of technological

inventions developed by the company, including the "Adhan computer" which calls for prayers five times a day at the right time anywhere in the world.

Frazer-Nash has a long history. The company said it has been providing innovative solutions to engineering problems since the early 1920s.

Its founder, Archibald Frazer Nash was known for his sports car designs, and during World War 11, the company's hydraulically-powered gun turrets were in constant use in British aircraft, tanks and motor torpedo boats.

Kamal, a frequent visitor to Malaysia, said marketing the electric vehicles required tackling the mental block people have.

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