

Never say die Datin Susi

By MEERA MURUGESAN

KUALA LUMPUR: She's never been afraid of taking on the boys or beating them at their own game.

In Form One, Penangite Datin Susi Nurani Razikin marched to her principal's office and convinced him that she should be allowed to learn Industrial Art like the boys instead of Home Science.

The fact that she would be the only girl in a roomful of boys learning about engines, carpentry and metal work didn't

deter her. Not only did she excel in class, soon, the boys were trying to copy her homework, and teachers were highly impressed with her diligent and meticulous approach.

It's a pattern that has been repeated throughout her academic life and career. Never one to shy away from challenges or stick to the conventional, she is today, the director of Prometeo (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, a company involved in selling Italian-made hovercraft.

Prometeo is the sole Malaysian distributor for Hi Tech International Srl (HTI), an Italian

manufacturer of hovercrafts, airboats, and jet and water rescue vehicles.

Her venture into this highly specialised field started early this year after an offer from the Italian Trade Commission and the Italian embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

It's a field that few, if any women, would consider venturing into given the nature of the product, but not only is the 45-year-old passionate about promoting the use of the hovercraft in Malaysia, she took things one step further by learning how to pilot one herself. The savvy businesswomen

spent two weeks in Italy last month to be trained on the usage and workings of the hovercraft, and having as her fellow "students", members of the Italian fire brigade. Once again, she stood out as the only woman in the programme.

"If I don't know enough about the product, how can I persuade people of its effectiveness? That's why I tried my hand at it," said the youthful looking mother-of-two during an interview at her home in Federal Hill.

Excelling at whatever she tries her hand at is nothing new for Susi and she credits her early education at a Chinese school in Bukit Mertajam, Penang, for instilling a strong sense of discipline in her.

"The Chinese school as well as the boarding school I went to, both in Bukit Mertajam, shaped me into what I am today, as someone who's willing to strive for what I want and never shy to be different."

Her combination of good looks and intelligence even saw Susi gracing *The Malay Mail* on Feb 18, 1994, as the paper's 'Page One' girl!

Susi, who has a Bachelor in Technology (Industrial and Electronic) from the University of North Florida in the US

and a Master in International Trade (Machine Tools) from the University of Pisa in Italy, is thrilled at the prospect of promoting the use of the hovercraft here.

"I've never been afraid of

challenges, in fact, I thrive on projects which require me to push myself to the limit," said the Datin who speaks Mandarin, Javanese and Italian besides English and Bahasa Malaysia.

Describing hovercrafts as one of the most flexible and safe vehicles for use on land and water, she said it can serve in any situation, from flood rescue efforts to enforcement activities in our waters by customs officers or the navy and army.

It can even be purchased by resorts or hotels with waterfront property or by oil and gas companies to transport staff.

Susi said the hovercraft can also be used on any surface — whether it's water, sand, grass or mud — and doesn't need a jetty or harbour to dock like conventional boats, making it a highly versatile vehicle. "The fact that it doesn't capsize easily even in choppy waters is an added bonus as safety is always an issue that must be considered."

HTI has a patented system for its hovercraft, using elements called "inverter cups" that, in addition to conventional directional control, also allows the hovercraft to brake, reverse and rotate around a vertical axis when stationary or moving, just like a helicopter.

"Piloting one was amazing and, believe it or not, really simple, almost like riding a motorbike. I'm not someone who likes to just sit and watch, and it was really a valuable learning experience and a whole lot of fun."

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MAKING A DIFFERENCE: Susi in full gear during her training session in Italy



FLASHBACK: Susi as *The Malay Mail* front-page girl on Feb 18, 1994



THE ROSE: Susi with fellow trainees in Italy during her piloting experience

While a small hovercraft can carry between four to six people, larger models have the capacity for up to 150 passengers.

By early August, Prometeo is hoping to conduct a series of demonstrations on the effectiveness of the hovercraft and airboat for various agencies and organisations in Malaysia, including the government. The public will also be able to see for themselves the versatility of these vehicles through similar demonstrations.

In the first week of August, it will also organise training sessions for those interested

in learning how to pilot a hovercraft. They will be conducted by experts from Italy and available to interested parties at RM250 per person.

The one-hour session will include a brief knowledge of engine safety and piloting a hovercraft. Interested participants can sign up for full certified training which will be made available later.

For Susi, the culmination of all these activities will mean yet another challenge she has stood up to and overcome, a far cry from the situation she found herself in after returning to

Malaysia from the US in October 1993.

She returned home with just "two suitcases and two cats" as she puts it, leaving behind the life she had built for herself there and giving up a job with great prospects.

Her then eight-year-old son, who was already schooling in the States, remained behind in the care of her American ex-husband.

"My father was very ill and I needed to be with him, but it was tough, especially, when I had to leave my son. But I didn't want to disrupt his education and I knew my ex-husband would

take good care of him."

She stayed by her father's bedside, nursing him until he passed away in April 1994. Initially, she wanted to return to the US, but decided to honour her late father's wish of having her live and work here.

"He had wanted me to stay back, to do something for the country. He said the country needed me and I'm so glad I took his advice."