



Ms Charmain Kwee practised law for about two years, focusing on criminal and matrimonial law, before leaving to work in Eurokars Group, whose brands include BMW, Rolls-Royce, Mini, Mazda, McLaren, MG and Pagani. ST PHOTO: LIM YAOHUI

## Young Ones

# Trading love of law for car empire

Ms Charmain Kwee wants to help her father – motor magnate Karsono Kwee, who owns Eurokars Group – hand over the business smoothly

### Christopher Tan

Ms Charmain Kwee likes to hang out at Julaiha Muslim Restaurant, a 24-hour coffee shop in MacPherson Road with tables spilling onto an adjoining alley.

"I was here just last night. I was with my best friend. He lives in Woodlands and I'm in Tanglin, so this is like a midway point," she volunteers as we sit down for this interview at the roadside eatery.

Ms Kwee, 28, is the youngest child of motor magnate Karsono Kwee, who owns Eurokars Group, the biggest privately owned multi-franchise dealership in Singapore.

"We've known each other since 2016. It's very platonic," she adds, saying she has had no time to date because she keeps long hours. "After a long, tiring day, you want to gravitate towards people you're comfortable with, and people you can rant to, instead of meeting someone new."

She says her father has been "subtly pushing me to get out there, but my focus is still currently on work".

"So, I say to him, 'You want me to help you to sell cars or find a boyfriend?' He usually stops at that question," she says with a laugh.

Helping her father sell cars had not been on Ms Kwee's immediate horizon.

In fact, she had long been fascinated with the law, having dreamt of becoming a policewoman when she was a little girl and, eventually, being called to the Bar after studying law in Singapore Management University.

She practised for about two

years, focusing on criminal and matrimonial law. It was the latter which opened Ms Kwee's eyes to the importance of family.

She had also noticed how her 76-year-old father was getting on in years. "I love my dad and I want to help him hand over the business in the most comfortable way possible, without worry of succession," she says.

While the reins could be handed over to hired professionals – which would allow Ms Kwee to continue pursuing her career in law – she says one thing would be missing: passion.

"My dad's vision was to always maintain that passion for cars, which he has," she says. "I feel that kind of authenticity can be carried through only with people who have grown up with him, which would be my brother and me. Because no one else has seen the ins and outs of the business, of the way he runs things, of how he had built this business from nothing to what it is today."

Mr Kwee's son from his first marriage, Herbert, 46, runs Eurokars' businesses in Indonesia.

Ms Kwee confesses that the prospect of having to eventually take over her father's 13-brand business spanning four countries is very daunting.

"I haven't thought about completely taking over his position," she says. "I'm just thankful he's still around, that I came in during this period when he's still able and active in the business. He's a good role model for me."

In Singapore, Eurokars' brands include BMW, Rolls-Royce, Mini, Mazda, McLaren, MG and Pagani.

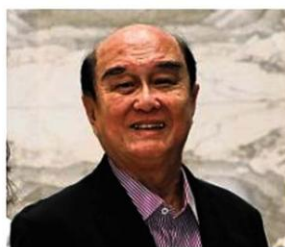


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**MS CHARMAIN KWEE**, the youngest child of motor magnate Karsono Kwee (above), on why she is helping out with the family business

The group is constantly growing.

In December 2023, it opened a \$115 million, 100,000 sq ft head-quarter complex in the Leng Kee motor district.

In Australia, it is building a \$4 million, 140,000 sq ft facility in Port Hedland – north of Perth – for a truck business which will be serving the mining community there. In Perth, a \$7 million, 60,000 sq ft aftersales facility for Mazda is in the works.

In Indonesia, a \$17 million, 34,500 sq ft facility is being constructed to house BMW and Mini in PIK 2, a seaside township dubbed "New Jakarta City". Its franchises in Indonesia include Bentley, Porsche, Maserati and Ferrari.

In Shenzhen, the group opened a \$6 million, 6,000 sq ft Rolls-Royce showroom in December 2023. It is the group's third Rolls-Royce showroom in China, following Nanning and Shanghai.

But the motor industry is fast-changing, with several car manufacturers now looking to assume a stake in the retail business. As such, there is risk associated with making heavy infrastructural investments.

Ms Kwee is well aware of that, but she says not all manufacturers are taking that route. Some recognise the importance of local knowledge, and the relationship dealerships have with consumers.

She points out that Eurokars has a whole suite of other services, including car servicing, body repair, accident claims, used cars and vehicle leasing.

Ms Kwee is looking to grow the leasing business, which she

believes gels with the mindset of younger people, who prefer to be asset-light so they have more money to spend on experiences.

Ms Kwee says one of Eurokars' competitive edges lies in it being a proprietorship.

"My dad sees the business as an extension of his family, and he treats his staff like family members," she says, explaining that if the company were to go for public listing or to merge with another group, it might become "too corporate" and risk losing its agility, its service culture as well as its "heart and soul".

"Those are values that my dad wants to maintain, and that's something that I don't want to lose," she says.

While Ms Kwee insists she has no inclination for a serious relationship yet, she makes time to unwind.

"I like to skateboard. I just like the feeling of the wind in my hair," she says. "To destress, I also go for drives in my BMW M4 Cabrio, quite often with the top down."

"I like coffee. So, I will check out different coffee places over the weekend if I have time, to chill and hang out with my friends."

And, of course, having prata and teh tarik in greasy sarabat stalls.

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• Follow Christopher Tan on Instagram @chris.motoring

• This is the first instalment of a miniseries on the next generation of motor industry leaders.