On top of the world

Ahmad Fakri has conquered the highest mountains in all seven continents

A WEEK before Ahmad Fakri Abu Smith received the delivery of his brand new Hyundai Tucson 2.0, he told his father to brace for a surprise.

For this amazing Malaysian, who has conquered the highest mountains in all seven continents, there would be no cause for celebration. Three days later, his father collapsed and passed away. This was in May last year.

It had been the 33-year-old’s intention to use the Tucson to drive his elder around. With the ample space, rolling a wheelchair on and off would have been a breeze, far cry from his former Proton Putra days.

For the climber, who was once presented with a T-shirt that read Monal, The Greatest (Ahmad’s nickname) after he safely led a team of 23 to the Everest Base Camp, there would be no tears.

He recalls the time in 2007 during the Everest climb when he had to listen to his mother’s worried sobs during a telephone call.

This was just before Ahmad and a team of seven climbers including his partner, Ahmad Reduan Rozal, and Marina Ahmad, the first Malaysian woman to conquer Everest, were due for a difficult journey though the Khumbu ice falls and the Hillary Step. Known as the death zone, temperatures can go as low as -35°C. As it is, the team would encounter two dead bodies belonging to a Korean expedition.

I told my mother not to cry. If I make it, I’ll come back. If I don’t, then I am sorry,” recounts this bachelor.

With his oxygen tank turned on full blast, it would take Ahmad 34 hours of climbing to reach the summit and after that, he told himself never again. For this alpine climber who had begun his epic journey in 2005 by climbing Mt Kosciuszko in Australia (highest peak in Oceania) and later Mt Kilimanjaro (Africa), enough was enough.

But of course, it wasn’t. After establishing himself as a partner in a law firm, the mountaineer would beckon again. Realising that the chilly summits and treacherous cliffs was where his heart truly resided, he would go on to scale Mt Elbrus (Europe), Mt Vin-