

# At a Premium

Behind George Devan's well-insured assets lies a case of mistaken identity and a personal story of unyielding determination and confidence, finds **Rajesh Taluar**.

**FILIAL PIETY LIES** at the heart of George Devan's success. If not for a seemingly ordinary event during his early adulthood, Devan would probably not be who and where he is today. He explains: "I can't be sure that what happened really changed the course of my life but it did make me work harder. It all started when, soon after my Sixth Form year, I decided to earn my own living. I applied for a job as a 'field assistant' thinking it was related to something in the plantation industry. However, I discovered that it was actually a euphemism for selling insurance!"

Devan accepted the job only as a means of fending for himself, but his outlook towards building a serious career within the industry changed when his father retired from the civil service in the late 1970s. "As the eldest son, my familial responsibilities became heavier. I was entrusted with the task of taking care of my family. The only way I knew how to do that was to work really hard," he says with quiet confidence.

The drudgery certainly paid off. Devan is arguably not only one of Malaysia's most prolific

insurance practitioners, but also amongst the most successful and wealthiest. His lifelong relationship with the industry started when he joined the fledging Malaysian Cooperative Insurance Society (MCIS) in 1964 before moving to American Assurance Alliance (AIA) — the company he remains with — a year later and continued to learn the basics of the trade. "The best people in this business will tell you that the best teachers are always your clients. I went out everyday to see people, knocked on doors and made friends. I did that for years and years."

Devan's name is synonymous with the now famous tagline: "If you see me, don't think of life insurance. If you think of life insurance, see me" and his life is the dream of every high achiever. The first Malaysian to gain admission to the Million Dollar Round Table (MRDT) — an honour achieved through excellence in financial services — much has been documented about the multi-millionaire's humble beginnings as a life insurance agent, and whose fame and fortune has provided him the luxury of working only six

months a year. He spends most of the remaining time in the United States, where he has a home in sunny Santa Ana, California. Devan is also a sought after speaker within the industry circles and is socially visible through his association with clients and friends who are among the country's movers and shakers.

"Of course, I cannot be grateful for what I have achieved if it were not for so many people. For instance, in 1977, when a friend asked me how was business, I said it was okay but could be better. He told me to see him the following day and it was in that year that I closed my first RM5 million sales record. I will never forget that."

Despite his high profile, Devan underscores his reputation with the genuine regard in which he is held. "I am a simple person who is afraid of appearing before big crowds," he notes with a hearty laugh. "Whenever I have been invited to relate the story of my success and life to an audience, I have always been afraid. I talk really fast during the first half because I still get