

Bentley Club visits Ruston's Roses

It was sniff the roses and sniff the petrol when club members visited Ruston's Roses on Saturday.

The clan was hosted in the recently completed visitors centre which in addition to rose "stuff" has a dedicated car museum for the growing number of visitors visiting the world famous establishment.

One of the biggest, most diverse and important collections of roses in the world, was recently named as the home of the National Rose Collection of Australia.

Part owner, Richard Fewster gave members a rundown on what changes had been made since he and his wife Anne Ruston had purchased the property from David Ruston three years ago.

Originally a fruit orchard, the property today it is one of the Riverland's premier tourist destinations attracting more than 10,000 visitors from around the world each year.

Richard outlined some of the challenges water restrictions had imposed on management of the property soon after their purchase.

The 27 acre Rose farm now boasts a computerised drip irrigation and fertigation system as part of the conversion of the property from flood irrigation and cultivation to a no till management system.

There has also been a strong trend to mechanization with the introduction of practices like machine pruning, which has cut nearly 10 weeks of manual labour out of the pruning season.

The new visitor centre and car museum is reflects the decision by the new owners to improve the offer to the growing number of tourists who visit the property each year.

Richard freely admits the idea to add the car museum was to give him somewhere to park his collection of historic racing cars, but also as an attraction for the many males who are dragged to the garden by their rose loving wives.

Each year the property supplies more than 50,000 dozen roses (600,000 stems) to florists in Adelaide, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth as well as some 400,000 buds of grafting wood to Australia's nursery industry.

The Riverland's unique climate is a major contributor to the prolific production strong, full-headed blooms harvested from the garden.

It is the secret for roses grown on the property retaining the magnificent and distinctive scents so often lost when they are grown indoors. This feature is not lost on the hundreds of wrens and other birds which inhabit the property.

Most of the varieties on the property produce six flushes of blooms each year, starting with the spectacular spring flush at the end of September. With modern horticultural practices, the roses are kept blooming until well into winter the following year, giving a nine-month season.