

Jaguar Drivers Club visit to Ruston's Roses

It was sniff the roses and sniff the petrol when Jaguar Driver's Club members visited Ruston's Roses at Renmark on Friday, April 13.

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.

Cars on display included a pristine T Ford, three Lotus's including the first Lotus to arrive in Australia (a 1955 Lotus 6) a rare Zeta sports car and a 1926 Amilcar CGSs.

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.

Managing Director, Anne Ruston gave members a rundown on what changes had been made since she and her husband Richard Fewster 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.

Anne 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. As a consequence the property now uses just over 50 megalitres of water compared to 171 megalitres in 2003.

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.

Anne freely admits the idea to add the car museum has given Richard somewhere to park his collection of historic racing cars, but also provide 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.

Some details on some of the cars

1926 Amilcar CGSs

Of all the small sports-racing cars that proliferated in France after World War One, the Amilcar was the most famous and most successful. Built at St. Denis from 1921 through 1937, they did extremely well in the hotly contested 1,100-cc class, in which so many fierce little French cars were racing.

The car on display here features a 1,074-cc engine with full-pressure lubrication, four-wheel brakes, four-speed transmission, and front semi-elliptic springs.

Its known history is complete back to 1926 when it first arrived in Australia. Amilcar started producing cars in 1921, and won the world's first 24-hour race in 1922, the Bol d'Or. Amilcars competed in the 1924 Targa Florio, and the Mille Miglia in 1927 and 1928. Models evolved from the CC, C4 and CS to arrive at the CGS, or "Grand Sport," in 1924.

The CGS was almost like a miniature Bugatti grand prix racer, and many aficionados regard it as the quintessential lightweight, small-displacement French sports car. It is a lovely piece of mobile art deco, with its cycle-type fenders and wire wheels. Making all of 30 hp at 3,600 rpm the CGSs scoots along surprisingly well because it only weighs about 1,250 pounds. In contrast to many cars of its era, the CGS has four-wheel brakes, with an ingenious sliding rod inside the kingpin to allow braking action to remain constant as the front wheels are turned. In 1926 a lowered "Surbaisse" version (like this one) were introduced with an improved cam profile raising power to 35 hp at 4,500 rpm. Other improvements included a larger sump, bigger brakes, and a cast aluminium firewall.

Richard Fewster (co-owner of Ruston's Roses) has owned this car since 1960. It has been restored twice since then. The car was imported into Australia in the late 1920's to "beat" the then dominant Austin Sevens at motor racing events. It arrived in Australia with a rare overhead valve conversion which was going to be its secret weapon to beat the Austins. From all reports it struggled to meet the expectations of its original owner.

Records show the car was converted back to a "slightly warmed" side valve engine which proved to be more reliable and often more competitive than its original overhead valve derivative.

The fact that the car was imported fitted with a French body, rather than as a rolling chassis ready to accept an Australian made body, makes it a rare item.

The Zeta – Australia's own "Second Car"

During the 1980's you could be forgiven for thinking many car manufacturers were turning their products into mere appliances – but if you were to wind the clock back even further (to the 1960's), you would find the Lightburn whitegoods manufacturer turning the appliance into a car!

Harold Lightburn, the company's owner and founder, was convinced that many Australian's would like the convenience of a 2nd car. To get things started, he purchased the rights to the British Anzani mini car; and then created a new fiberglass 'Station Sedan' body shell. A Villiers 324cc twin powered the front wheels.

The advertising campaign ensured Harold's message was conveyed, when the Zeta was marketed as "Australia's own second car". The Zeta was to employ a lightweight, simple and cost effective design – something so simple that a whitegoods manufacturer operating out of Camden Park in suburban Adelaide would be able to manufacture.

The problem for Harold was that other manufacturers had also seen the need to bring smaller, cost efficient models to market – and they already had design engineers at the ready, and ample parts bins from which to source material.

One such manufacturer was BMC, who released Alexander Issigonis masterpiece Mini around the same time as the humble Zeta. It comes as little surprise that the Australian public did not take to the Zeta, and a mere 363 were sold.

Technically, the Zeta was an oddity. The gearbox setup meant that the car could go as fast in reverse as it could forward, at a death-defying 60 mph! But to prove to the public that the Zeta was indeed a reliable and well manufactured car, it was entered into the 1964 Ampol 7000 mile cross-country trial. Many assumed the little car would fall apart after a few hundred miles, however it would win over many critics by putting in a stellar performance.

Nevertheless, the public simply did not warm to the idea of a tiny, 2 cylinder car .Despite failing to capture the imagination of the Australian public with the Zeta Station Sedan, Harold Lightburn pushed ahead with plans to release the Zeta sports car.

In 1959 that Lightburn obtained the rights to the Frisky Sprint- a low, sleek 'Michelotti' designed sports car similar to the Goggomobil Dart. The Frisky Sprint's designer, Gordon Bedson, was persuaded to leave Frisky and join Lightburn with a brief to develop the Zeta Sports.

He bought with him the prototype Frisky Sprint as well as a supply of fifty motors by Fichtel&Sachs, the 493cc engine from the legendary FMR "Tiger". The windshield was changed, the tail restyled, and the final drive altered. It seems most Zeta Sports were built in 1961, but the car was not introduced until the summer of 1964 for some reason. While Lightburn had a network of Alfa Romeo dealerships at the ready, they were under whelmed by orders, and only some 28 were sold.

This car

Engine:	2 cyl.
Capacity:	494 cc
Power:	20.5 bhp
Transmission:	4 spd. man
Top Speed:	125 kph
Number Built:	28

Ruston's Roses Lotus 6 was the first in Australia

When Australia's first Lotus (the car featured in Ruston's Roses car museum) arrived in the country in 1955 it created quite a stir for more than one reason.

Colin Chapman's reputation and the cars he was creating had well and truly preceded the car's arrival downunder.

For Graham Strachan, the car's new owner it was going to be his passport to making a presence on the Australian motorsport scene.

For Australia's motor racing fraternity it would be the first glimpse of Chapman's all conquering Lotus Six.

While the car went on to dominate its class and establish a name for itself on the Australian motorsport scene, its arrival turned into a dose of Colin Chapman reality for its new owner Graham Strachan.

For a start it did not have an engine or gearbox when it arrived - a fact which precipitated an immediate barrage of angry letters to Chapman, who obviously felt he was far enough away in the UK not to feel the heat which was causing the smoke downunder.

One only has to look at the angle of the front wheels in the Wheels magazine front cover photo of the Six on its arrival in Australia to realise there was not engine in gearbox in the car when the photo was taken.

In typical Chapman style the argument was settled when Chapman offered Strachan the Australian franchise for Lotus in return for him dropping the claim for an engine and gearbox. In a letter to Strachan he suggested it would be easier for Strachan to find a suitable engine and gearbox in Australia, and after all, the cost of it would be nothing compared for what he would make out of the franchise.

While Strachan found a Coventry Climax engine and MG TC gearbox, there is no record of him ever importing another Lotus and getting some of his money back.

Strachan's relationship with the car was also cut short by the intervention of CAMS when it took away his competitor's licence for participating in the non CAMS sanctioned around Australia Redex trial.

For up and coming racing driver Doug Chivas, Strachan's bad luck was his good luck. Strachan "loaned/ sold/assigned" the car to Chivas who went onto to record a string of successes and establish himself a reputation for being a driver with a "future".

The fact that he had access to one of the most successful sports racing cars of the time provided the platform he needed.

First sold in 1953, the Lotus Mark 6 was the first production competition Lotus to be built in any numbers, establishing the firm as a small-scale manufacturer. The car was stark and simple in the style of the club racer of the time, but under its simple aluminium panels was a triangulated, tubular space frame far in advance of the beam type in general use.

Thus, the cars had both torsional rigidity and little weight, riding on a split Ford front axle giving independent suspension and a Ford rear axle (on the standard sixes) hung on combined coil springs and telescopic dampers.

For the rest of the features, the Mark 6 was largely down to the buyer as it was sold as a kit car to avoid purchase tax. Chapman himself used a 1500cc Ford but owners fitted anything from the 1172cc side-valve Ford upwards. MG engines were popular, but selection was usually made from what was available. The same applied to the gearbox, brakes and wheels - Ford, Austin or MG were common - but the overall result was inevitably the same, a very basic car for road fun and club racing with success.

The Mark 6 went from strength to strength, over 100 being built in three years.

This car is fitted with a Coventry Climax FWA engine and is one of only four Mark 6's in the world with a de Dion rear axle assembly and the large Alfin brakes configuration.

Drive is through an MG TC gearbox. The car has an extensive and highly successful Australian racing history. Strachan the Australian franchise for Lotus in return for him dropping the claim for an engine and gearbox

Much of its early successful racing history was in the hands of the late Doug Chivas who became better known in his later competition successes at the wheel of Chrysler Chargers at Bathurst and other Australian racing venues against the likes of Allan Moffat and Peter Brock.

The car is still regularly used in historic racing competitions and events and because of its extensive racing history, is often called on to participate in re-enactments of early Australian motor racing events including the 1956 Grand Prix at Lake Albert in Melbourne.

One of the things that make the Six special, in addition to being the first Lotus imported into Australia, is the fact that despite many rebuilds it still carries many of its racing scars.

For the unwary restorer or caretaker it also has a few surprises including the cut down Ford Ten steering box. Ford it is, but not from a right hand drive Ford Ten, but rather from a German made left hand drive Ford Ten. Why is this important - well for a start a recent part rebuild showed that a right hand drive steering box produces exactly the opposite reaction a driver would be looking for

1961 Lotus Elite Super 95

The Type 14 Elite was Lotus' first road car. Given Colin Chapman's philosophies it was inevitable that the Elite would be more than just another grocery getter.

Designed with competition intent and built with the latest space age materials, the car was light, aerodynamic, and laid claim to technical specifications as good or better than any other car of its day. From the moment it appeared at the 1957 London Motor Show it was clear that this machine was something special.

The Elite was not just the most elegant Lotus to date, not just the most sophisticated British car to date, it was arguably the most technically advanced road car ever attempted. Not until the advent of the McLaren F1 will a road car match the concepts introduced in the Elite.

For example the Elite is made almost entirely of fibreglass and does not have a chassis. This car is chassis number 1838. The car has an extensive and highly successful racing history both in the UK and Australia. While it is now road registered this car spent the first 2 years of its life as a race car.

The car's first owner, John Ralph (a retired arms dealer), recently travelled from the UK to be re-united with the car. During the two years he successfully raced the car in the UK and Europe, Ralph was able to combine his profession as an arms dealer and motor racer by employing a full time mechanic who transported the car from race track to race track ready for him to drive.

Richard Fewster (co-owner of Ruston's Roses) has owned this car since 2001. Its previous owner was Barry Gray from Perth, who circuit raced the car and competed in events such as the Classic Adelaide, winning the historic section three years in a row. It has an extensive Australian racing history and is still used in competitive events and demonstrations.

Thanks to the Internet, owners of Lotus Elites like this now have a strong and active global network for the supply of parts and technical information to support the ownership of such valuable vehicles.