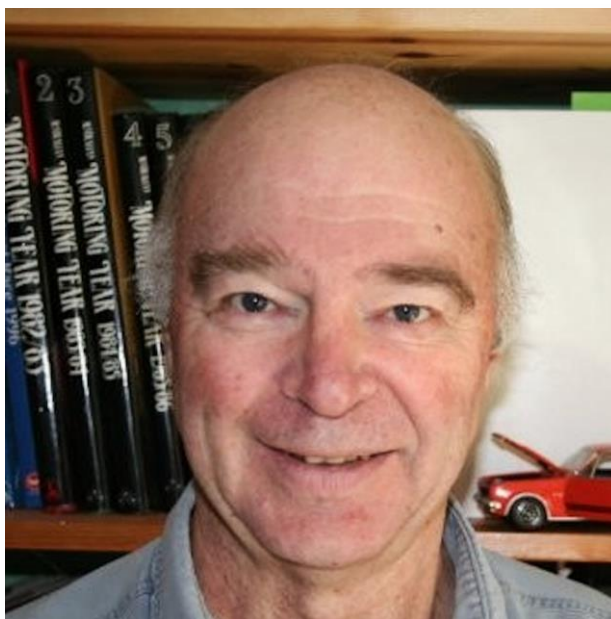


## June Guest Speaker – Gavin Farmer

Our guest speaker at the June MGM was Gavin Farmer, a motoring writer, historian and photographer who was working in the UK in 2004-05 and gained a good inside knowledge of what was happening at MG Rover during those crucial years.

Gavin and his wife Sue moved to the UK early in 2003, partly so he could further his writing career after contributing articles for *Automobile Quarterly*, *Collectible Automobile*, *Bimmer*, *The Automobile*, *Sports Cars International* and one or two others. By the time they returned to Australia he'd had become the most internationally published Australian motoring journalist.



At the Paris Motorshow 2004 he met David Watson and Giordano Casarini. David had been the chief media guy at JRA in Sydney before going home to England where he held the same position with MG Rover. David arranged for Gavin to test drive the (then) new MG ZT 190 which he reviewed for *Sports Car International*, and later the ZT260.

While never part of the plan approved by BMW when they were creating the Rover 75, David said that MGR wanted to get into the market dominated by the BMW 5, Mercedes E and Audi A6 where high performance was combined with a compact size and a luxurious interior.

30 million pounds was allegedly spent on re-engineering the 190 into the 260, in collaboration with Prodrive. Only 882 cars were built before the closure—716 MG ZT 260s and 166 Rover V8s. No way was the investment ever recouped.

“The ZT 260 was a little like a British version of our Ford Falcon GT as they both used the same V8 engine and Tremec 5-speed manual gearbox. The V8 was the same SOHC 4.6-litre V8 from our Falcon and developed 260bhp at 5000rpm and 302lbs-ft of torque at 4000rpm; the differential had Australian BTR components in it, so the car was something of an international cocktail. I drove it for a week and thoroughly enjoyed the smooth power, the torque and lovely rumble from the 4 exhaust pipes.

“The British press canned it because they believed to should have been faster! I mean, it sprinted from 0-60mph in 6.7 seconds and ran to 149mph at 5000rpm according to an *Autocar* road test I read. That put it line-ball with the BMW 5, AMG-Mercedes E and Audi A6 except for the Alpina B10 that I drove in Bavaria and I backed off at 275km/h or just over 170mph. For a British car the ZT260 was beautifully made and assembled, a legacy perhaps of the input from BMW”.

In early 2005 Gavin met Giordano Casarini and they spoke about the design and development of the MG X-Power coupe that was being openly discussed in the media.

The X-Power evolved out of a failed DeTomaso project, the Bugui on which Casarini was the senior engineer. MGR paid DeTomaso GBP7 million for it! And we all thought MGR was almost broke!! At first it was called the X-80 and shown at the Frankfurt IAA. Peter Stevens restyled it and it was shown again in 2001 with a suggested price of GBP65k. The standard version would have 325bhp with options up to 465bhp and more.

“I never had that meeting with Casarini because a few days before the appointment David range me to tell me MGR was closing, they were stony broke. Instead of wasting money on a racing program and the X-Power perhaps they should have been concentrating their efforts on new Rover 25 and 45 models that undoubtedly would have spawned MG version and kept the till ticking over. It seemed no matter what the Germans did, they couldn't make MG profitable.

“So, I never got up close and personal with the X-Power but I did thoroughly enjoy the ZT 190 and ZT 260 and the conversations with David and Giordano. Has to count for something”.