

TASMANIAN MOTORSPORT HALL OF FAME

Gavin Youl (Inducted 2015)

In March 1958, at the age of 21, Gavin Youl made headlines when he piloted his supercharged Chipmunk aircraft to a new Class C Australasian altitude record of 26,000 feet. Both Gavin and older brother John were keen flyers and not surprisingly, had a passion for fast motoring, with John having started racing in 1953 and Gavin some years later. In 1959 at Longford, Gavin lined up in an Austin Lancer fitted with an MG twin-cam engine and stunned everyone when the car was timed on the flying mile at 113 mph. It was only overshadowed by the performance of John, in his father's 3.4 Jaguar, which beat David McKay's previously dominant similar car. A Porsche Super 90 followed, and in this car Gavin scored significant overall and class wins at circuits in Tasmania and on the mainland, including second place to Leo Geoghegan's Lotus Elite in the Australian GT championship at Bathurst in 1960. That same year the brothers teamed up to race their fathers new Mercedes Benz 220SE in the inaugural Armstrong 500 touring car race at Phillip Island, but just when it seemed a victory was possible the car blew a tyre and rolled while holding a two lap lead. In 1961 Gavin was encouraged to go to England by Jack Brabham, to race the new MRD Formula Junior car designed by Australian Ron Tauranac. At its first meeting at Mallory Park, the combination finished second in both the heat and the final. The next meeting at Silverstone the car suffered a holed fuel tank and Gavin was forced into the pits to top up, before finishing seventh in a car that had virtually no brakes for most of the race. At Aintree, Gavin was forced out of the final with a blown head gasket, but then at Goodwood, he finished fourth in his heat and second in the final, despite numerous problems including a fire in the pits during practice. It was now time to go home and to do this Gavin agreed to ferry a single engine Cessna 180 that Brabham had sold to a Tasmanian business. Together with good friend Roger Tregaskis and journalist Eoin Young, they covered 14,000 miles in 98 flying hours making 30 stops in 18 countries. The MRD had been shipped back to Tasmania, where Gavin used it to good effect, before venturing to Catalina Park in NSW, to win a hard fought battle with Leo Geoghegan in the Lotus. He then repeated the effort at the 1962 Longford meeting where the car was timed at 132 mph. Gavin then returned to England with the intention of racing an updated version of the MRD, now called a Brabham, but a crash at Brands Hatch during pre-season testing left him with a broken collarbone and out of action for some time. The repaired Brabham was bought back to Australia but, after competing at a couple of meetings on the mainland Gavin decided to retire from the sport. He had numerous other interests including ownership of the first privately owned helicopter in the state but sadly passed away at the age of 45 in 1992 after a short battle with an aggressive cancer.

Profile by Barry Oliver