

Champion of Official Great Aussie Meat Pies

When it comes to upholding the Aussie meat pie, there is probably no greater champion than **John Ross**. For 22 years John has run the Official Great Aussie Meat Pie Competition, an event he founded with Craig Perry in a bid to raise the standards and awareness of our much beloved pastry icon.

Australasian Baker spoke with John Ross about the Competition's achievements.

What has been the main aim of the Competition? The aim has been to establish a standard which training colleges can teach to. We have tried to make meat pies healthier through emphasizing the need for thinner pastry and improving the meat to pastry ratio. This is something we've been pushing for 22 years. People often refer to the good old pies of the 1950s but in reality they were pretty ordinary compared to the ones we enjoy today.

Out of the 30 or so judges we train for the Competition, 15 are TAFE teachers. Those trainers are passing on their knowledge to the next generation of pastry chefs. This is important as some bakers who have been around a long time don't see the need to improve. They say "This is the way I've always done it," and are reluctant to change their ways.

Modern pastry chefs are far superior in their knowledge of how to make a great meat pie than they were a few decades ago. As a result, today's pies are a lot better for you than they were 20 or 30 years ago. While pies will never be a healthy product, like most treats they are good to eat in moderation. There's no reason why the meat pie can't stand alongside other fast food as a meal choice.



John Ross

How has the Competition impacted on the quality of pies today in Australia? We'd like to think that we've lifted the standard of meat pies in Australia. We've maintained the integrity of the competition and it has relevance. The standard we have established has given manufacturers pride in their product. I often get asked by people where they can get a good meat pie. I'm proud to say I could name hundreds of bakeries across Australia where the bakers are passionate about making a great meat pie. Just don't ask me to make one!

What is the biggest trend you've seen over the years? Over the last 10 to 15 years there has been considerable growth in the gourmet meat pie category. Gourmet pies turn ordinary pie makers into pastry chefs and creative geniuses. You only have to review the medal winners list on the Competition website to see the huge variety of ingredients and recipes used by the Competition entrants.

What impact does winning the Competition have for a bakery business? We advise the Overall winners of the Competition to expect at least a 400% increase in business, following their win. The Competition is seen as the pinnacle of excellence in this category, and many winners of regional baking shows also aim to make it big at the Competition. This is certainly possible – Trinity Heights Bakery in Kelso won the Orange Baking Show in 2007 and then went on to win the Overall award at the Official Great Aussie Meat Pie Competition that same year. Back in 2002 The Purple Onion Café won a local radio station competition in Melbourne and scored a free entry in the Pie Competition as part of their prize, they in turn went on to win the Competition that year.

The Official Great Aussie Pie Competition



The Official Great Aussie Meat Pie Competition has been renamed and has a new fresh look!

The Australian Pie Council has decided to omit the word "meat" from the competition title, to reflect the ethnic influence in Australia, and to encompass the fast-growing gourmet pie category.

There will also be a new look website coming ... more details will be available in the next issue of *Australasian Baker* magazine, the official publication of the Official Great Aussie Pie Competition.

The Official Great Aussie Pie Competition 2012 will be held 10 -13 September at the Fine Foods Show in Melbourne.