



Tesco's category director for bakery Stephen Mason (left), Jane and Trevor Jackson and presenter Kate Thornton

Quality Product Award sponsored by TESCO

The theory of pie

"Thrilled to bits" with its Quality Product Award, sponsored by Tesco, at last year's BIA, Jackson's MD Trevor Jackson explains why his winning pie was a product of that age-old ethos 'less is more', reports Andrew Williams

Forget yer bells and whistles. When it came to winning the Tesco-sponsored Quality Product Award at the Baking Industry Awards 2008, Jackson's Bakery opted not to throw the kitchen sink into its hand-raised Traditional Steak Pie – thankfully for the dental health of the residents of Chesterfield. For Jackson's, less was clearly more – apart, that is, from the meat content, where more is clearly more, with 30% meat, all sourced from a good local butcher.



The winning pies have a deep pork pie shape

The pie has a slightly different shape to the oval you might associate with a steak pie, and it resembles more closely a round, deep pork pie. Other than that there's nothing more complicated than seasoning and a little thickener for the gravy. The secret, explains production director David McBurnie, who has been tweaking products at Jackson's for 13 years, is the pastry base. "The texture of the meat is as good as having steak on a plate. But I always think that a pie is all about the pastry – anybody can cook meat, can't they? The pastry melts in your mouth."

So what's so distinctive about the pastry that impressed the palate of the judges? "It's nice and short," says McBurnie. "You tend to get quite a tough pastry with a short pastry savoury product. Because of the way we make ours, we can retain a lot of the shortness."

This is achieved using a batter method, whereby the fat and water is beaten together before adding the flour. "The ingredients aren't that different to some other pies out there – it's the way we make it that lightens the pie."

Heygates, Bako and BFP are the main suppliers, as are Friars Pride

and D F Dickens in Nottingham, for meat production ingredients such as seasoning, potato flake and rusk, as well as a local butcher who supplies fresh daily.

Jackson's was up against a Savoury Scoffin, a bacon and Parmesan savoury muffin from former BIA winner, Monty's Bakehouse, and a six-grain wholegrain loaf from sourdough bake-off specialist La Brea Bakery. MD Trevor Jackson had received an erroneous tip-off before the awards that the Scoffin had

won it, so the win came as a genuine shock.

To get there, Jackson's had submitted a successful written application, leading to an invite to supply a batch of products into the award sponsor Tesco's head office for judging by Tesco and independent judges. They based their final judgements on the quality of the product alone, rather than a knowledge of the company, or whether it supplied supermarkets (Jackson's didn't).

So what made the product stand out against other high-quality submissions? "You don't need to be too elaborate with the product," Jackson states simply. "We won with a traditional steak pie that many people wouldn't have thought to have entered."

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A brand new bakery will help grow the wholesale business

Building on success

Jackson's new bakery, built to make a traditional range of savouries, morning goods and confectionery, is a marked change to the old facility, which was housed in an old chapel. The extra space means there is potential to grow the wholesale business, which accounts for two-thirds of turnover.

The build was completed in just six months. "I sourced a company from Shrewsbury called Capital Construction, and I took some advice from other food business architects. They got on with the lot and they were excellent," says Trevor Jackson.

That's not to say it was all plain sailing. Problems with electricity supply meant that a budgeted £7,000 for energy installation rocketed to £45,000, with the installation of an electricity substation.

A £300,000 investment in machinery, project-managed by Norbake, included two Mondial Forni Ciclomondial gas deck ovens and a Rotor Wide gas rack oven, two Lillnord 10-rack tunnel-type retarder-provers, a six-rack dough controller and a two-rack prover.



Trevor and Jane are confident their products are top-notch - but strive for perfection

In order to succeed in a product category, simplicity can be as successful as radical innovation. "I would say that a quality product is a product you are confident in," says Jackson. For anyone entering this year's BIA, he offers a useful tip: don't pull out all the stops simply for the competition if you cannot back up your quality claims with daily production.

"Use one of your normal products and make it as well as you would on a day-to-day basis," he advises. "There's nothing worse than winning a prize for something that you cannot replicate daily. In years gone by, you would get bread competitions where people would put their dough pieces through pastry brakes to get rid of the air bubbles. What's the point? All the products that we entered came off our normal production."

The BIA trophy sits alongside a glut of skills and training awards in a brand new £1.2m bakery, which opened in November 2008. And although BIA would like to claim credit for the recent expansion, alas, it was already in the offing. "We've been searching for a site for 10 years! We couldn't find the appropriate piece of land. Now that we're in, we're pleased."

Nevertheless, Jackson's has benefited from promoting the win among wholesale customers and in its one retail shop, while they also got local media coverage. "It got a very good following," he says – not least from one customer who travels from London every six weeks to buy 85 pies. "That's quite an accolade!"

The masterplan now is to build on the industry recognition Jackson's has received and develop the wholesale business. "I like the type of business we do and we'll expand upon that. The new premises allow us to be more consistent and efficient. We'll diversify down the route of high volumes – but only on certain products that

View from the awards night

"It was a massive do – there were over 800 people sat there and I'd never been to an event of that sort of magnitude before. It was a very nice, professional do and a great experience. Meeting Kate Thornton was really nice."

– Trevor Jackson, owner

What winning meant to us

"It was a big fillip for our staff. Every one of our production team can produce that pie, because that's the way we operate. They all felt like they had a little finger in the pie, if you like."

– Trevor Jackson, owner

I would be happy to do that with. And if the business is there, we'll take every opportunity that comes."

The company will also continue to tweak its traditional craft products to perfection. "We're always trying to improve the product," says McBurnie, and all staff are encouraged to offer suggestions if they think they can improve the product. "You will reach a stage where you think you're there, then another baker or someone from outside will come along and improve on it."

Which begs the question, how much better can a steak pie get? We await the results of this year's BIA with interest...

● Details of categories and how to enter BIA09 will appear soon in BB and at www.bakeryawards.co.uk