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# The UK National Honey Show

## BRITISH BEEKEEPING'S MAJOR ANNUAL EVENT

By John Kennedy

The UK's 87<sup>th</sup> annual National Honey Show was held at the Sandown Park Racecourse at Esher in Surrey over three days in late October.

It is a pretty good indicator of the Show's relevance when it attracted thousands of attendees over the three days.

There was also a monumental and possibly all-time record number of 2,065 entries from 261 entrants in the competition classes for extracted and comb honey, mead types, frames, wax, gifts, photography, microscopy, confectionery/cooking with junior classes included for the young.

I first attended a National Honey Show briefly on one day

in 2012 when I was in the UK but pressed for time.

This year improved planning enabled me to better allocate my time totalling two days at the Show.

In short with its size it is not a Show that you just breeze in and out of! And the organising committee seem to recognise this with an uncomplicated, logical layout over the extensive spaces of a modern multi-storey racecourse grandstand.

What was I looking for? – well certainly any new beekeeping ideas, products or technology, evidence of value adding opportunities, as well as a general measure of the health of beekeeping in the UK particularly at the hobby or small

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# The UK National Honey Show, cont'd

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enterprise scale. I can say I was happily satisfied on all three counts.

But first I should be disclosing the Show format.

To begin there are the heavy lectures or advanced technical and research presentations and the Show offered about fifteen of these; so, if you were interested you can easily take in most of them over the three days.

I attended one on how in Wiltshire local community activity is opening up 'bee roadzz' with vegetation and plantings that facilitate bee flights across the countryside.

A second one was on the genetic makeup of the Irish black bee.

The lectures were complemented by a workshop program that totalled nineteen events on practical subjects as diverse as microscopy, candle making, hive potions and polishes, photography, sustainable plantings, even skep making and best of all a couple of hours on the final afternoon devoted to mead making and tasting.

On the Saturday, the final day of the three, there was a special lecture program to encourage newer beekeepers.

I managed to take in a selection of all the learning events, while paying attention to the results of the exhibit judging sessions, as well as cruising the trade show that ran in conjunction over the three days.

With fifty odd suppliers or manufacturers, even inventors of new products for the beekeeping industry, it was a real cornucopia of ideas and products.

The very first value-adding opportunity I encountered was the Northumberland Honey Company who featured 'from the bee to the bottle'.

They told me they were initially mead makers but were working to switch 150 hives of their honey production progressively over to sparkling honey wine.

A lot of this honey is sourced from heather in Scotland.

They are employing the French *methode champenoise* method of fermentation in the bottle to produce several types of sparkling honey wine in various styles - sweet to dry, and colours, including a rose. And with their advertised bottle prices at circa 35 pounds sterling (over \$A60) each I thought they could be on the right track.

They told me they had a targeted production of 10,000 bottles each honey vintage!

So far as equipment is concerned the displays were dominated by enormous stock presentations by Thorne and Maisemore Apiaries - both long established, over a century in Thorne's case - and they both tend to dominate the retail beekeeping supply market in the UK.

There were also presentations by leading bee suit makers including Sherriff, BB Wear and others including a new tailor from Pakistan.

An interesting new product was shown by UK company Thermosolar Beehives that it says uses heat from the sun to kill Varroa mites.

Their proposition is that Varroa mites cannot reproduce at temperatures over 40 degrees C while their conventional Langstroth hive employs two Thermosolar panels, one on the front and one on the top to capture heat from sunlight.

With insulated walls the heat is apparently kept in the hive where internal heat sinks ensure the heat is evenly distributed.

This was an exhibit that seemed to get a lot of interest

albeit it seemed to be at the prototype stage.

They claimed also that bees will overwinter better in one of their hives with colonies building up ten to fourteen days earlier than conventional box hives.

This could be a product to keep a watch on as it evolves.

I took interest in two of the workshop sessions; one running for a full day was on hand making skeps with straw.

It was well attended and although skeps have no relevance to beekeeping today it is one of those likely trades to be lost, hence their desire to retain it as a traditional skill.

The definite highlight was the mead making from start to drinking workshop delivered by a very experienced, dour but entertaining beekeeper Ron Hunter.

He went through the constituents of the various mead types including mellomel, cyser, metheglin, pyment and honey ale or beer.

Ron emphasised clean working in constant temperatures with many equipment items such as tubing, airlocks, bottling and corking aids etc. that can be purchased from home brew stores in the UK.

His accurate recipes included using high quality Gervin specialty yeasts from the Muntons company as well as a need for fairly long maturation.

The workshop which ran for a couple of hours was fully booked, cost nine pounds to participate and was a great primer for any likely mead maker.

Then there was the tasting of five meads - a couple brought by course members, two of Ron's own and a commercially produced Lime Bay Winery mead that he reckons is the best value mead type available in the UK today. I concurred with his view.

I hope to produce a couple more articles from the Show over the next couple of months.

One is sure to be about the steps the Beekeepers Association is taking to indenture and train young beekeepers and on several other relevant industry issues.

The National Honey Show obviously could not function without sponsorship of which the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers (founded before 1300 and owning its London property since 1501!) is a major one.

A huge volume of volunteer beekeepers staff the show so you don't step far before a new conversation starts.

While local provincial or district bee clubs also play important roles; for instance, one of the major trophies for the honey competition has been sponsored for over forty years by the same regional bee group.

The organisers tell me they would very much like to get some Australian entries into the honey competitions and there are no quarantine restrictions to the submission of Australian honey.

Other Australian involvement in the show was modest.

The Australian Manuka Honey Association was apparently represented by Michele Lancaster while a local school demonstrated the Flow Hive for their second year; I encountered neither.

Daily attendance at the Show costs twenty pounds sterling with the venue the Sandown Park Racecourse being easily accessible by train in under an hour from Waterloo station, albeit that it is a quite pleasant fifteen-minute walk to the racecourse after arriving at the Esher station.

The 88<sup>th</sup> Show dates in 2019 will be from Thursday 24 October to Saturday 26 October and anyone who can plan

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# The UK National Honey Show, cont'd

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travel to the UK to include these dates and a stop over at this event won't be disappointed.

At worst you will walk away from the Show with several kilograms of informative reading matter! Or for more information see [www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk) where the technical papers are progressively being added if you want to do some homework.



Class 16 of the Competition is for a 'Decorative Exhibit to Display Honey with Pure Moulded Beeswax or Mead or Both'. Above: is the winning entry which took the theme of a memorial to the end of 100 years from World War 1 and was a team entry by the North Shropshire Beekeepers Association. The photo probably doesn't do it justice, but it stood over a metre tall.



With over 2,000 entries in the competitions, the major categories being for bottled honey and meads, the UK's National Honey Show is well organised with significant input over each of the three days from a roster of volunteer beekeepers. The competition classes are always well supported and a very well organised.

This year there were 2,065 entries. Photos above:

- top: wax entries.
- middle: Mead workshop
- Bottom: Skep group
- Left: honey entries.