

# Stung by family tradition



**Britt Smith**

GETTING stung is all in a day's work for beekeeper John Edmonds.

The Mt Duneed man doesn't count how many times a day he gets stung, but estimates it's in the hundreds.

"We just scratch them off. Those under the fingernails or on the nose are the most uncomfortable, but we don't swell," he said.

Despite their painful sting, he can't afford to dislike the backbone to his business.

Mr Edmonds has about 500 hives, each home to about 60,000 bees which make Edmonds Honey.

It's a family business that started with his father, who at the age of 17 kept bees as a hobby in Geelong West.

Following in his father's footsteps, Mr Edmonds adopted the hobby as a young boy and in 1995 he developed a business, which he runs from two sheds on his property.

In a shed full of honey, a wall map of Victoria was speckled with pins marking the location of Mr Edmonds' hives, mostly in state forest and national parks.

The area stretches from near the Murray River to Anglesea, including the You Yangs and the Brisbane Ranges.



Sweet work: John Edmonds with a big honeycomb. Pictures: TONY KERRIGAN

Closer to home, he has bee boxes on Belmont Common and along the Barwon River, and leases each "site" from the State Government for \$85 a year.

"We move the bees from one site to another, depending on what tree is in flower," he said.

Mr Edmonds can identify native trees at first glance and knows when all the varieties flower.

And the tree varieties reflect the honey flavours. He makes about 20, including Blue Mallee, grey box, citrus, hill gum, red stringy bark and yellow gum.

But it's the manuka honey that works like medicine. Mr Edmonds is a great believer in its healing powers, and can reel off stories where the manuka has cured acne, stomach pains and healed burns.

Mr Edmonds also



Yum: John tests a pot of his fine honey.

breeds Queen bees, which he selects for disease resistance and honey production.

Due to the drought, he will change the genetics to a more hardy bee as he predicts a difficult year ahead.

With much of the state on fire, Mr Edmonds

hopes his forests won't be next. But the show must go on - in the forests.

And ironically, that's the selling point of this world-class honey. The hives are protected from pollution by their "bush" surroundings.

■ Edmonds Honey is available in fruit shops in Geelong.

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