

# SBA Technical Data Sheet No.26

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## Preparing and Exhibiting Honey

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### Run/Liquid Honey

This is another category in honey shows and is often shown as three separate classes: - 'two jars of light honey/two jars of medium honey/two jars of dark honey (excluding Bell Heather)'. If it excludes Bell Heather, then there should be a separate class for Bell.

As with all exhibits do not leave it to the last minute. Run honey, when first jarred, can be full of very small air bubbles and you need to let the honey settle and the air bubbles rise to the surface. The best way to do this is jarring at least two weeks in advance of the competition, keep the jar in a warm place (e.g., airing cupboard) and this encourages the air bubbles to rise. If you slightly overfill the jar, then when it comes time to prepare the exhibit for the show bench, one can place a piece of cling film over the surface and when carefully lifted off it will remove any specks on the surface along with a small amount of honey. This should bring the honey to the correct level. A torch will show up any specks there might be in the honey and also highlight any incipient granulation often seen on the base of the jar. Heating gently gets rid of this granulation. Some people use a water bath to remove granulation but I, personally, do not like using the water bath as some water could accidentally get into the jar. The lid has to be loose when warming the honey. It is also not a good idea to use a microwave as

this could spoil the honey due to local overheating.

If you are not sure whether your exhibit is in the light, medium or dark class then use the B.D. Grading glasses. Hold the jar against a white background with the grading glass against the side of the jar. The exhibit should be lighter than the light glass to qualify for the light class, darker than the dark glass for the dark class, and the medium class is between the two grading glasses. The B.D. Grading glasses are the only approved glasses used in honey shows as other types of grading glasses will probably have a slightly different shade of glass.



What is the judge looking for? External examination - are the jars matching; are the lids correct, scratch/dent free; is the exhibit in the correct class? On opening the jar - immediately catch the aroma and check, using the torch, for any surface specks; using a tasting rod check the

viscosity and flavour. If the exhibit has low viscosity or is very 'runny' then use a refractometer to check the moisture content. The refractometer should be calibrated for honey. The upper limit for blossom honey is 20% and ling heather 23%.

### Cut Comb, Sections and Frames

Yet again I emphasise reading the schedule especially if you intend entering a cut comb class. The weight can vary depending on the show. These three categories can be divided into heather and blossom.

Taking cut comb class first, select a nice, evenly drawn out and capped frame where thin super foundation (unwired) or starter comb (a strip of foundation about 1/2 - 1" deep attached to the top bar) has been used. The midrib (foundation) should be central throughout. Make a template of the cut comb container and, using a clean sharp knife, cut round the template which has been placed on the honey comb. Place the piece of cut comb on a wire 'cooling' rack and let any excess honey drain before placing it carefully in the container. If a transparent container is not used, then the judge will carefully lift out the piece of cut comb to check it is fully sealed and not 'floating' in excess honey. If two pieces are asked for in the schedule they should be taken from the same comb.

Do not try and produce cut comb honey from a frame where wired foundation has been used as the foundation is thicker and the wire must be removed. Normally one would cut through the entire bit of comb honey and eat wax and honey. It can be unpleasant to try and eat thicker foundation.

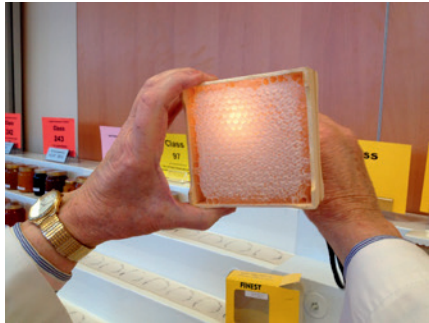
Sections are not so easy to produce as one requires a strong hive for the bees to



work them. When exhibiting make sure the wood surround is clean and free from propolis and wax. It should be fully sealed into all corners on both sides.



For deep and shallow frames, we again need a strong colony and best if there is a good flow of nectar. That way the bees will work hard and fill the frame into all corners and fully seal the honey. A schedule might have the wording -



'A shallow frame of honey suitable for extracting (excluding ling heather).' There will be a separate class for ling heather.

What is the judge looking for? In all classes, is the comb fully sealed on both sides and into all corners; there is no 'tunnelling' from wax moth or braula (Bee Louse); no cells of pollen; one type of honey throughout; no sign of granulation. When the schedule states 'suitable for extraction' then the judge looks to see if wired foundation has been used (this gives strength when extracting) and the sealed cells are proud of the frame allowing an uncapping knife to uncup without the frame fouling the flow of the knife. Shining a torch through the comb shows up any faults. A show case, with glass or perspex on both sides, should always be used to exhibit a frame of honey.

### Heather Honey

Taking the bees to the heather for some beekeepers is an annual outing usually towards the end of July and into August. Bell Heather and Ling Heather are very different. Bell comes out earlier and has a long flowering period. To get a crop of Bell Heather is excellent and it is a delicious honey. It is completely different from Ling and is extracted in the same manner as blossom honey. Often there

is a separate class for Bell, so the same conditions apply as for the run honey classes. When shining a torch through a jar of Bell then it has a rich reddish colour.

Ling Heather is better known. Because of its thixotropic nature it has a completely different consistency, and a good jar of Ling Heather honey has lots of air bubbles throughout. The thixotropic nature means that normal extracting is not possible, and one has to agitate the honey in the cells first before placing the frame in a tangential extractor (a radial extractor will not extract ling heather honey). A more popular way is to cut



*A good example of the surface of Ling Heather honey.*

out the honey from the frame, wrap it tightly in linen scrim cloth and press out (there are various types of presses in the market). This method produces the air bubbles which the judge is looking for. The air bubbles should be even throughout and when the judge uses a tasting rod, they draw it over the surface of the honey to form a 'v'. That 'v' will remain or take a while to disappear.



When opening a jar of Ling Heather honey, the aroma is very distinct and fills the air. When filling the jar, slightly over fill to get the correct weight of honey. This is due to the air bubbles in the honey. Best to weigh the jar empty and again when filled to get the correct 454g if using that size of jar.

It is not often one can produce a good example of Ling Heather as the bees find other wild flowers to forage from. In this case the exhibit can be entered in the Heather Blend class. The surface will be matt, smooth and have no movement as in the soft set classes.

Not so clear in the photo but the torch does show up all the air bubbles and any sign of 'foreign' bodies (wax, granulation).

### Chunk Honey

This is an interesting and appealing exhibit but can be fiddly to prepare. As in preparing cut comb, a piece of comb should be cut neatly and drained before carefully inserting into the jar. The comb should be the width of the neck and the full depth of the jar and preferably one piece. Note when inserting the comb, it should be the right way up. That is looking sideways on to the comb one will see that the cells are at a slight angle sloping downwards towards the midrib. Carefully pour liquid honey into the jar trying not to introduce any air bubbles. There should not be any wax floating on the surface and no sign of granulation in both comb and liquid honey. The honey in the chunk and the liquid added should be the same type.



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