



Britain is home to a national pie eating competition, and it takes place in December every year at Harry's Bar in Wigan. The rules are simple: whoever eats a single meat and potato pie in the quickest time is crowned the winner.

mushy peas. There is also the option of serving pies that are topped with mash potato, such as fish pie and Shepherd's pie. Not only are these dishes easy to prepare, but they offer the comfort factor that many diners are seeking when ordering one.

PUT A SPIN ON IT

When it comes to fillings, it seems to be the case that Britons hold traditional flavours close to their hearts. Despite its wide offering, including the likes of Chicken Balti and Potato, Pukka's best-selling pie is Chicken and Mushroom, followed by Steak and Kidney and All Steak. That said, it is still important to have less traditional fillings on offer as a way of satisfying the more adventurous diner who is willing to experiment with different flavours. Styman-Heighton points out that there is now a demand for spicy, vegetarian, vegan and Middle-Eastern-style pies and pasties, owing to the multi-cultural nature of society and the availability of exciting ingredients.

As for the mash potato that can be served on top of or alongside a pie, Nic Townsend, trade marketer for Farm Frites UK and Ireland, suggests creating a point of difference by adding extra ingredients to the mix, such as bacon or cheese. "Consumers love seeing an alternative to a classic - anything that offers a pie away from the norm is seen as an indulgent choice that can command a more premium price," he comments.

If you do not have the time, skill or resources to make pies and pasties in-house, then the alternative is to buy them readymade. The decision then, of course, is who to purchase them from. When asked to name a pie brand in independent research, 49% of respondents said Pukka without being prompted, suggesting it is a brand that consumers know and trust.

"Pukka continues to lead the way within the pie category by tapping into alternative consumption moments that meet the varying needs of foodservice outlets, ensuring there is something for everyone," says a spokesperson for Pukka. "Our range of pies appeals to all needs, from the traditionalist All Steak to Chicken Balti for the curry lover and Potato, Cheese and Onion for veggies."

THE SECRET TO A GOOD PIE OR PASTY

Fillings aside, the pastry is arguably the most important part of any pie or pasty. Rather than being soggy or stodgy, the ideal pastry case is crisp, golden and



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sturdy enough to hold a generous amount of filling without being too thick. Even though fillings can be chopped and changed, the quality of the pastry must always stay the same. Perfecting it can be a rather difficult task, however, and Levet recommends buying good quality, readymade cases to reduce the time needed for preparation and guarantee a consistent looking range.

Of course, ingredients also play a part in the quality of a pie or pasty, and operators must bear in mind that many consumers now care about the origin of their food. "We believe the secret behind a good pie or pasty is the freshness of the ingredients, which is why at Proper Cornish we prepare our vegetables in-house, just in time for every batch," says managing director Chris Pauling. "What's more, our potatoes are grown specifically for us, just seven miles from our bakery, and are delivered fresh on a daily basis. Likewise, our swede and onions are grown nearby."

If baking a pie with a raw filling, David Dunne, director of Interbake Limited, says it is important that the pie is cooked in a tin as opposed to a foil container. This is because metal tins enable heat to pass through to the pastry, ensuring that the filling is baked and any harmful bacteria killed. Dunne adds that "tins allow the base and sides of the pie to bake and become golden coloured, as opposed to foil, which reflects heat and produces a pale coloured finish".

It is true that consumers buy with their eyes, and many will struggle to resist a range of freshly-baked pies and pasties with a golden hue. So, work on your offering and be sure to grab a slice of the action.