

Maleny's Cream Carriers

Cream Carriers – Once the Lifeblood of Maleny

In the 1950s and 1960s, they were the lifeblood of Maleny. They were the vital link between the isolated farming families at the end of dirt roads and the businesses in town that relied on the farmers for trade. These unpretentious workhorses were the cream trucks ... and there's a lot more to their story than you may realise.



▲ Cream trucks unloading at Maleny Butter Factory, late 1950s Photo: courtesy of Maleny Historical Society



by JUDY
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Cream, newspapers, bread, groceries, fuel, fertiliser, seed, pigs, calves, school kids – the cream truck carted everything.

The trucks, which were usually a 2–5 tonne truck with a stock crate or canopy on the back, would deliver cream and kids to town in the morning, then pick up the supplies needed by the farmers, and deliver it all back to the farms the next day.

There were around 250 farms supplying cream to the factory in the 1950s, according to Bob Hawkins, who worked in the office of the butter factory in Coral Street for 16 years. "The majority of those farms had a share farmer," says Bob, "which is different to today."

Chris Brooker, whose father Bert Brooker had the cream run from Curramore to Witta and Maleny, describes how the cream trucks operated:

"After offloading the cream to the factory, the trucks would meander up Coral and Maple Streets, going from side to side, throwing out tied up hessian bags to the various shops.

"The bags would be filled, then picked up the following day for delivery back to the farmers. Hygienic practices included wrapping any perishable items in double layers of newspaper to keep the dust out because they were all gravel roads.

"Some of the cream trucks also doubled as school buses. The Curramore carrier would, on cream days, pick up the children and the cream from the far end and stop at Schultz's Road corner.

"The children would help him unload the cream and stash it under a bush (the bush is still there) then load planks for seats in the back of the truck, put a supposedly child-proof gate across the back, and the truck would become a 'school bus'.

"The children would be delivered to the school, the truck would return to Schultz's Road, and reverse the procedure – load up the cream and carry on. The children didn't mind being in the back using the cans as seats as they were all farm kids."

And while the kids on the Curramore run didn't mind helping to unload the cream cans, it was a different story for the kids on the Reesville run.

Kevin Plucknett, whose family had a farm at Reesville, clearly remembers going to school in the back of a truck, replete with a stock crate, owned by Horace Jones.

"Every Monday, he used to pick up pigs and take them to Landsborough. Tuesday morning, we all smelt like pigs! He just hosed it out a bit and we hopped in the next morning.

"It was a bit of excitement I s'pose for young people. We didn't care, we all had fun."

And while that may have been alright for the boys, I personally think it's no wonder that some of the girls found it a treat to ride in the front with the driver.

But things didn't always go smoothly. If the farmers didn't supply a hessian bag or billy can for their supplies, the shop keeper would place the goods inside the cream can. To the uninitiated, this probably sounds quite sensible – except – the cream cans had to be washed out before they left the factory and if there was still water in the bottom of the can, the farmer would end up with soggy bread!

There were also other instances when the bread would end up soggy for a very different reason, and the farmer would find himself in the wife's bad books.

Chris explains further: "Inside the bread sometimes, were bottles of rum, bottles of scotch, bottles of other stuff, which worked really well until the bottle broke within the can, and then the wife found out what was going on. And she'd get right up the carrier and the husband!

"And of course, they'd lose a loaf of bread."

Despite the occasional mishap, the farmers were always grateful for the service given to them by the cream carriers, and would make a point of showing their appreciation at Christmas time.

The farmer would often give the driver some Christmas cake and something to wash it down with. This may have been a tot of rum, in other cases it was a bottle of beer.

"Christmas Day would be hilarious," says Chris, "because the farmer would bring a bottle of beer out to the carrier, and you'd find about 10 trucks lined up at the factory and none would be unloaded – they would all be sitting under the tree drinking their beer."

Of course, in our modern era of super-intensive regulations, none of these practices would be condoned. But I can't help but admire the ingenuity of our forebears and how these customs shaped the traits of community cohesiveness, tolerance, casual resoluteness and most importantly – a sense of fun.

So dear readers, let's all raise a toast to Maleny's pioneering cream truck drivers. Cheers! 🍷



L to R: Kevin Plucknett, Bob Hawkins, Desley Malone, Chris Brooker and Bill Heading fondly remember the days of the cream carriers



The old Maleny Butter Factory in Coral St is now a veterinary surgery



Maleny Butter Factory and Maleny Dairy Co-op, Coral St, 1955. Image supplied by Bob Hawkins