

No fries, no kids' meals.. but it's the best

YOUR LOCAL HERO

A family run business is the toast of the pub game after scooping the Oscar of the licensed trade.

Thousands voted for their favourite local but only one could win the title of Sunday Mail Pub of The Year 2005.

That honour goes to the Ship Inn in Irvine, run by Iain Murray, 56, sons Chris, 27, and Jamie, 25, and family friend Gary McCulloch.

Last night, Iain said: "I am so pleased we have won.

"The Sunday Mail Pub of the Year title is very important as it's a big seal of approval from customers, both regulars and our many visitors from all over Scotland."

The Ship Inn was built in 1597 and has been licensed for more than 250 years. Iain has brought it bang up to date by dishing up some of the best pub grub around.

With 34 staff, including six chefs, The Ship can cater for more than 600, serving hearty dishes like mince and tatties, chicken baked in pastry and their "big" or "wee" steak pies.

A brave move in the west of Scotland, Iain refuses to do chips, fried food or children's dishes.

But it has paid off as Iain attracts people from all over Scotland, as well as tourists from Scandinavia and USA.

He said: "The Swedes come here on Ryanair flights.

"They are really easy going and love trying traditional dishes such as haggis or Cullen skink.

"The Scandinavians are really into their whisky, too. We are listed in the American Lonely Planet guide to Scotland so we get a lot of Americans.

"There are always footballers or golfers in and we once had chef Albert Roux here for lunch."

Iain has been in the licensed trade since he was 21 and previously owned the Turf Hotel in Irvine. But he always wanted to own The Ship and got his wish when it came up for sale 16 years ago.

He said: "The Ship was my dream pub. I'm glad my sons have come to work here so it can continue as a family business."

As many customers are not local, Iain has decided to build an accommodation zone with five en-suite bedrooms.

Other finalists were The Foundary, Galasheils, The Tyneside Tavern, Haddington, and The Clachnaharry Inn, Inverness.