

This "boss" has 75 million workers

By Brian Ward
 Nearly 75,000,000 bees are lying in wait in the fields of Halton County — waiting to buzz down on unsuspecting flowers this summer to work for their master, beekeeper Ed Robertson of Hornby.

It's not nearly as violent as that but Mr. Robertson explained his bees are presently lying dormant in 28 different locations all over the central part of the county. Once spring comes, they begin to come out of a winter stupor to begin their summer labors.

All his bees are housed in 1,000 colonies and it is from these colonies that Mr. Robertson gets his honey during the summer. He explained that each of the colonies is broken down into hives with roughly 75,000 bees to a hive.

A bee hive is like a little community in itself, with a queen bee at the top of the rung, producing new eggs in the hive. Drone bees, explained Mr. Robertson, are in the hive to mate with the queen and produce offspring. They are killed off by the workers during the winter. The real workers are, naturally, the worker bees, and these three groups comprise the population of a single hive.

Mr. Robertson and his son Jack, 17, will go out into the fields near the end of May and check the hives for any damage and to examine the condition of the bees. He also checks each queen bee, of which there is one per hive, and kills her off if she is more than two years old, replacing her with a new queen, usually bought from a U.S. breeder.

Once clover is growing in the fields, Mr. Robertson's worker bees are off collecting nectar from the flowers. They collect it and through a miracle of nature, process it into honey in their bodies before returning to the hive.

Once in the hive, the busy worker bee deposits the honey in what are called honey "supers" which are really imitations of the cells in which the queen bee lays her eggs. The "supers" are placed on top of the hive. The worker bee is fooled into thinking the cells contain eggs, since his main purpose in life is to feed bee larva the honey he has made. "Once the workers have been "conned" into giving up their

honey, they return to the fields once again to gather more nectar. The season, says the beekeeper, lasts from May to the middle of September and he collects about 100,000 pounds of honey during that time.

When he and his son start collecting the individual honey combs from the "supers", they wear protective veils and gloves. "Let the bees be the boss and

you won't have any trouble with them," he explained.

The combs are brought back to the Robertson apiary, situated just north of Hornby on the Seventh Line, to be processed.

To be able to work with honey, it must be warm to allow it to flow, so the combs are kept in a warming room where the temperature is about 90 degrees.

After one or two days, they are ready to be worked on and the first step is to take the protective coating of wax off the combs which the worker has industriously put on to protect his work.

The beeswax capping is stripped off with heated knives and the combs, still filled with honey, drop off into an extractor. The honey flows out

of the individual cells, into a pipe and is pumped up into the second floor of the apiary where it is strained and runs into 3,000 pound barrels where it is allowed to settle for about a week. Mr. Robertson held up the straining cloth and said it was made of fine nylon which would filter out nearly all impurities from the honey.

Once the honey has settled, it is pumped back downstairs into large 650-pound barrels for transporting the honey to large honey wholesalers such as Billy Bee. Besides selling to the large honey companies, Mr. Robertson markets over 8,000 pounds of honey from his apiary to local customers who can buy the honey in small pails or in the combs.

For most people, beekeeping seems like a rather dangerous operation because of the bee's nasty habit of stinging when mad, and such stings can be painful to anyone.

"The stings don't swell on me anymore because I've become pretty well immune to the poison, but they still hurt as much as ever," he remembered with a painful grimace. Mr. Robertson figures he gets a sting per hundred hives he works with. He says the bees are more apt to be upset in stormy or uncertain weather.

He has been 34 years in the honey business as have his father and grandfather. One of the few complaints the beekeeper has is the lack of land on which clover can grow.

"It's all been taken up by houses and factories and I've been moving more of my hives every year."

Regardless of the influx of civilization, there will always be a place for honey in the sweet-toothed appetites of today and Mr. Robertson expects his son Jack will eventually take over from him and keep the 75,000,000 workers as busy as bees!



SWEET LIVING is to be had by Ed Robertson and his family as can be seen by these few samples of his one product—honey! Piled here beside Mr. Robertson are light and dark honey beeswax cones and the ever-popular cone honey, products which he still manages to sell to customers in the dead of winter. Although much of the honey is sold to large commercial packagers of honey, Mr. Robertson still sells 8,000 pounds of honey a year at his home. —(Staff Photo)

Library card is useful tool

A Milton library card is fast becoming a useful tool and adult borrowers from town can go to any library in Halton, Wentworth and Brant Counties, with the exception of Acton and

Brantford, and borrow books. The experimental borrowing system has just recently been put into effect by the regional library system. The main stipulation is that a borrowed

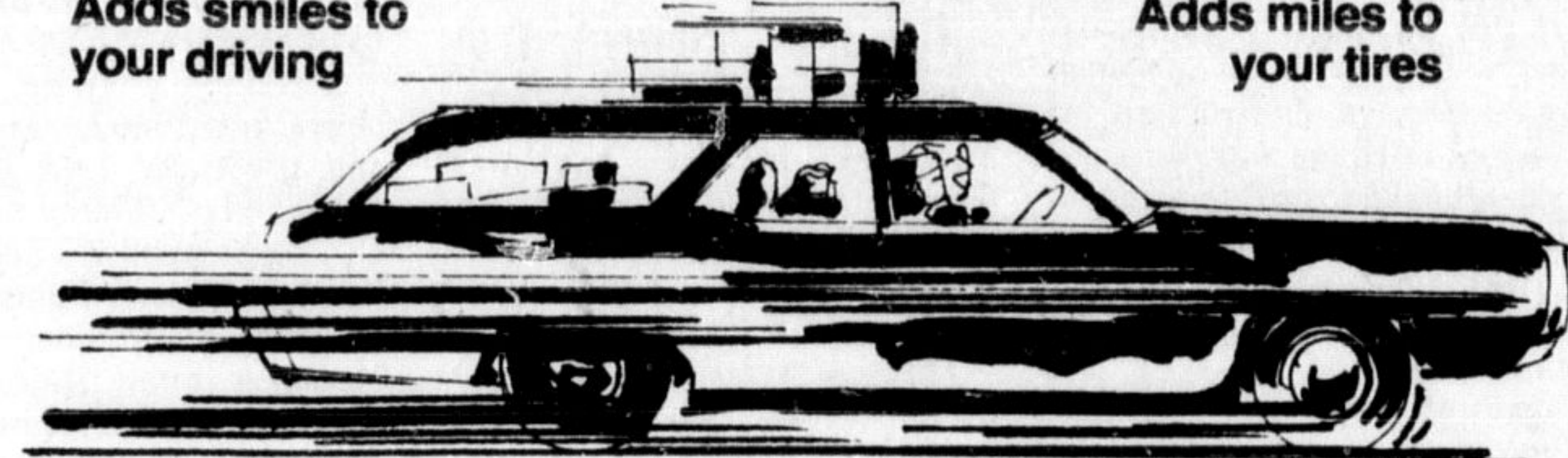
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