



Local hero

Duffy Sheardown, gourmet chocolate maker

The transferable skills are not exactly obvious. For 12 years Duffy Sheardown was an engineer in Formula One. After that he worked for the team that broke the diesel-powered land speed record. And now he makes some of the finest chocolates in Britain.

Admittedly — and this was part of the attraction — the competition for that accolade is less than intense.

“I was listening to the radio,” Duffy says, “and they said that only two companies in Britain were making chocolate direct from the bean.” One was Cadbury’s, the other was Willie’s Wonky Chocolates. He thought there was room for another. That was two years ago. When he explained his planned career change, he says, his family just rolled their eyes, “but now they like the chocolates”.

Duffy’s Chocolate has been in production for a year, is already supplied



Man behind bars: Duffy Sheardown is his own production line

to Harvey Nichols and is ranked by Sarah Jane Evans in *The Times* today as among the world’s best chocolate bars. It is exceeding all expectations — except, perhaps, Duffy’s. “There’s nothing terribly difficult about it,” he says, holding up some unroasted beans for me to sniff (“They should smell a little bit like wee”). “There’s no mystery to roasting beans.”

Most companies in Britain buy their beans already part-refined, in brown chunks called “liquor”. Standing by his bean-grinder — a little bigger than its coffee counterpart in a medium-sized café — Duffy explains why he wanted to be different. “If you don’t start with your own beans, you don’t control the process. The roasting makes a huge difference; it really changes the taste.”

The current staff of Duffy’s Chocolates consists of . . . Duffy. His fingers are his wrapping machine; all other equipment

came from eBay. He taught himself chocolate-making from books, the internet and trial and error. His factory is a two-room windowless shed between Clearance Flooring Direct and Home Bargain Warehouse on a grey industrial estate in the struggling East Coast seaside resort of Cleethorpes.

“If people want to come for a tour,” says Duffy, “I say ‘allow yourself five minutes.’” But you don’t need a beautiful or large factory to produce a high-end product.

“It’s an expensive chocolate,” he says. “Part of the reason is that it’s very hard to get beans rather than the refined product. We pay four times the spot price for cocoa and we make only small batches. But it’s the same with wine. Sometimes people want good wine and will pay more. Maybe they’ll choose to buy this, too.”

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