



RED HOT CHRIS CROWNED NORTH WEST YOUNG CHEF OF YEAR!

A BRIGHT young chef took yesterday's soaring temperatures in his stride to wow an acclaimed panel of judges and officially become the hottest culinary property in the North West.

Chris Rawlinson, who grew up in Chorley, Lancashire, beat four other exceptional young chefs in a sweltering cook-off at MANCAT in Manchester to win the title of North West Young Chef of the Year, sponsored by professional stock maker Essential Cuisine.



As well as the coveted trophy, the 23-year-old won a two week bursary abroad at an internally renowned restaurant with mentoring from an accomplished chef, a year's free membership with the prestigious Craft Guild of Chefs, a luxury holiday for two and a set of Global chefs' knives.

"It's so fantastic, such a feeling, such a buzz," said Chris, head chef at his own restaurant, The Red Cat in Whittle-Le-Woods, near Chorley, winner of the Food and Wine Awards 2007 Casual Dining Award which made it into the Michelin Guide this year. "I may run my own restaurant and have been on a few stages at other restaurants, but to win North West young Chef of the Year is something else, really wonderful."

"It gives young chefs who might work under the radar the chance to stand up and say, 'I'm a chef in my own right', giving you the confidence to make your mark. There's a 14-year-old who I'd like to take on at the moment that's got a certain something, and hopefully I can inspire him to make his mark too."

To win the title, Chris was tasked with cooking up a winning three course meal for two alongside four other 18-25 year old finalists, using local North West produce costing up to £25.

He impressed judges with a starter of West Coast Scallops, new season beetroot, Formby asparagus, watercress and parmesan tuille, main of rack of Lonk lamb spring cabbage, peas and carrots, rosemary puree and fondant potato, followed by 'coffee and toast' milk chocolate and pistachio mousse, coffee pannacotta, sugar tuille, nutmeg butter and marmalade for dessert.

Although the confident young chef, who has worked in London and Sydney, hails from Chorley, Chris was over the moon to represent Cheshire due to his close ties with the area. Training at South Trafford College, Altrincham, he also honed his skills at various restaurants in the county and is due to marry his fiancé in Lymm, near Warrington, later this year.

Chris waited seven years to make the North West Young Chef final, first entering at 16, and gave it his all against county winners from Cumbria, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Lancashire in yesterday's showdown.

To win, he had to impress a judging panel of competition organiser and British Masterchef Brian Mellor (Chef 'n' Farmer, Wirral), John Benson-Smith (North West Hospitality), Steven Doherty (chairman Ramsay Scholarship), Stefan Chomka from Restaurant magazine and Nigel Crane (chef and managing director of sponsor, Essential Cuisine, based in Cheshire).

Even with his experience at Red Cat, however, as a relative novice to competitions, Chris had his own challenges to overcome. "It's difficult because you are using equipment that is unfamiliar to you and cook a complete meal that would normally take four hours in one and a half hours. You are also only as good as the ingredients you are working with, so it's important to take time to get them right."