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Making the healthy choice

McDONALD'S can spend millions advertising its ''healthy choice'' menu but a lunch break during a long car trip confirmed just why it has been so many years since I dined under the golden arches.

Of course, some things never change, like that first assault of chip fat-laden air as you come in the front door. And while the menu has expanded to include ''healthy choice'' options, a closer inspection of the labels confirm enough sugar and fat to continue to expand the waistlines of consumers.

While I sat grumpily eating a muffin (there was not a single vegetarian burger or roll on option) I watched a constant stream of children charge up to the counter. A girl sitting next to me could have been no older than eight, but she had the body of an exercise-averse 40-year-old. It was a sad sight indeed.

Which is why I was so excited to find Oliver's Real Food on the Pacific Highway, north of Sydney at Wyong. It is — yes, truly — a healthy fast food restaurant.

Jason Gunn, a successful publisher who retired in his late 30s, was sick of the lack of decent food on the road, and his friends were sick of hearing him complain.

With a wife studying nutrition, Gunn decided to come out of retirement 12 months ago and set up a chain with the slogan ''real food, real fast''.

You can order sushi, toasted pocket breads, soups, stir fries, fruit salads and fresh juices (including wheatgrass shots). Certified organic produce is used as much as possible and the coffee is brewed on a La Marzocco coffee machine (handmade in Florence since 1927, no less!).

We loved the children's packs which include vegetable sticks, hummus, a wholemeal Vegemite sandwich, sultanas, fruit and yoghurt, water, and a free gift of a frisbee.

The prices are a few dollars dearer than the other fast food joints. But it is great value, particularly given the pristine and environmentally-sound restrooms.

About 10,000 travellers a week are passing through the two restaurants on the M3, and Gunn is gearing up to expand with the support of Caltex.

He says the South Coast is looking promising, as is the dreaded Federal Highway stretch and gastronomic wasteland between Canberra and Sydney.

Oliver's Real Food on the Pacific Highway, north of Sydney at Wyong, is a truly healthy fast food restaurant.

Shopping is looking up

PROUDLY Canberra born and bred, Sydney has never done it for me.

The traffic, egos, hair-curling humidity, I could go on ... I do concede, however, that the shopping is phenomenal and Canberra can't compete.

But things are looking up. Not only has the Canberra Centre expanded, but isn't it great to have our very own branch of Jones The Grocer in Manuka?

Now when you have dinner party guests due to arrive, there is no excuse for not sourcing that Iranian fairy-floss or Lescure butter, (or just a nice loaf of sourdough and some great cheese).

Also, Country Road in the Canberra Centre has just rearranged the furniture to accommodate a gorgeous range of children's wear. It has been selling in Sydney for 18 months, while we have been salivating over the catalogues.

It is a savvy move for the iconic store (which I have been frequenting since first inveigling a CR blue sweater into my school uniform at the tender age of 13) given its most loyal clientele are helping contribute to the current baby boom.

Shopaholic mothers will now be able to clothe themselves and their offspring in a one-stop trip, which can only lead to one thing — third-generation Country Road wearers.

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