FRESH IS BEST: Paula Gunn at her Oliver's fast-food outlet at the northbound Caltex site. — *Picture by Phil Hearne*

Please sir, can I have some more

NIBBLES

JENNY TARRAN

A pair of fast-food outlets on the Pacific Highway have given new meaning to the phrase ''health drive''.

THERE is now a healthier way to eat when travelling in either direction on the Pacific Highway.

Last year, Oliver's Real Food opened in the northbound Caltex complex at Wyong on the F3, and now it has also opened across the highway in the southbound centre.

Just like other fast-food franchises, Oliver's has ready-to-go food. The difference lies in the menu.

For breakfast try a breakfast pita pocket with bacon, egg, jacket potato, roasted tomato, capsicum relish and a fresh basil aioli, or choose the vegetable option.

You can also get a yoghurt cup, bircher muesli or miso soup with jasmine rice, and this is just the breakfast menu.

The rest of the menu includes salads, sushi, hot pockets, fruit salad, soups, stir-fries, juices and smoothies, along with special kids' meals.

Owner Jason Gunn said the idea for the fresh fast-food takeaway came after many trips from his Port Stephens home to Sydney.

"I used to get frustrated driving to Sydney and not being able to get decent food while I was travelling," Mr Gunn said.

"Now I'm giving people a choice."

The name was inspired by the chorus "food, glorious food" from the musical *Oliver*, and Mr Gunn said that diners included everyone from family groups to long-haul truck drivers.

"I've truck drivers who have told me how much healthier they are now that they can get a decent salad, and some of them have been known to buy a litre of the wheatgrass juice to drink on the road," he laughed.

He said that the kids' meal deals, with a choice of sushi or a sandwich along with raw carrots, celery, cheese, yoghurt, rice crackers, organic sultanas and a bottle of water, were a hit with parents (and the children also hankered after the frisbee bonus).

The northbound Oliver's is open from 6am to 10pm, seven days, while the southbound Oliver's is open from 5am to 10pm, seven days.

Night of nights looming

THE Hunter Restaurant and Catering Awards for Excellence will be announced on June 26 at Western Suburbs Leagues Club.

Already the line-up is impressive, particularly in the Contemporary Australian Restaurant – Informal category, with six restaurants being named finalists.

Following is a selection of restaurants and cafes which have been named finalists for some of this year's awards.

Asian: Le Dynasty Vietnamese Restaurant, Cooks Hill; Paul's Asian Affair, New Lambton; Sesame's A Taste of Asia, The Junction; The Banyan Tree, Hamilton.

Breakfast: Hughzies Lakeside Brasserie, Toronto; Three Monkeys Café, Cooks Hill.

BYO: Lena's Lakeside Cafe, Warners Bay; Salina Restaurant, Belmont South; Sandpipers Restaurant, Nelson Bay; Sesames on the Lake, Belmont.

Cafe restaurant, Newcastle area: Café de Beaumont, Hamilton; Caffé Macquarie, Belmont; Monet's Café, Newcastle; Northern Star Café, Hamilton; Starfish Café, Newcastle.

Cafe restaurant, Hunter/Port Stephens area: Awaba Café, Booragul; Secret Corner Café, Rathmines; The Vines, Nelson Bay.

Chinese: Chinois Restaurant, Newcastle; Peacock Palace, Warners Bay.

European: Anacapri on Darby, Cooks Hill; Zest Restaurant, Nelson Bay.

Family: Anchors Seafood Restaurant, Broadmeadow; Butlers on Hunter, Newcastle; Depz, Nelson Bay.

Fine dining: Awaba House Restaurant, Booragul; Butlers on Hunter, Newcastle; Old George & Dragon Restaurant, East Maitland; Robert's at Pepper Tree Restaurant, Pokolbin.

Contemporary, formal: Bay Views Restaurant, Warners Bay; Shakey Tables, North Rothbury; The Bistro Restaurant, Cooks Hill.

Contemporary, informal, Newcastle area: Brewery Restaurant, Newcastle; Hot Crab Brasserie, The Junction; lime bar & restaurant, The Junction; Paymasters, Newcastle; Silo Restaurant & Lounge, Newcastle; Turtles Brasserie & Bar, Swansea.

Contemporary, informal, Hunter/Port Stephens area: Aquablu Bistro and Bar, Nelson Bay; No 13 Cafe & Gallery, Lorn; The Cellar Restaurant, Pokolbin; Tillermans, Tea Gardens.

Indian: Indian Raj, Hamilton; The Only Place Indian Restaurant, Nelson Bay.

Italian: Benvenuti Treats of Tuscany, Cooks Hill; Biondi's, Raymond Terrace; Il Cacciatore Restaurant, Pokolbin.

We'll let you know the finalists in other categories over the coming weeks.

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QUALITY FARE: Glenn and Jennifer Thompson were celebrating last September when their Zest Restaurant at Nelson Bay was awarded a chef's hat in *The Sydney Morning Herald Good Food Guide*. Zest is a finalist in the Hunter Restaurant and Catering Awards for Excellence.