

Even computer geeks like to grunt and groan

Busting a gut to impress

VEINS popping, eyes bulging, face like a bashed plum, James Grahame has a strange idea of a fun Sunday.

Nine-to-five weekdays he's a 38-year-old computer geek with Sensis. His workmates say the heaviest thing he lifts is a lolly bag.

But weekends the Aussie Scot becomes a bona-fide strongman, with no explanation except "I watched *Braveheart* one night".

With seven or eight others, he is busting a gut, probably literally, to win a contest in the sideway and on the lawn of Doherty's Gym in Dandenong.

There is nothing flash about it because, basically, all they need is heavy stuff to try to lift.

"River rocks, barrels, kegs, anything you can lift from a building site. Kegs are my favourite," James grins after returning to his normal color.

First prize is the honour of coming first, and a go at the

Terry Brown

East Coast Strongest Man titles in Wodonga.

In the real world, competitors yesterday include an electrician, a carer and a couple of IT geeks.

Except for Derek "Thunder" Boyer, one-time *Gladiator* and the show's drawcard, they all need day jobs.

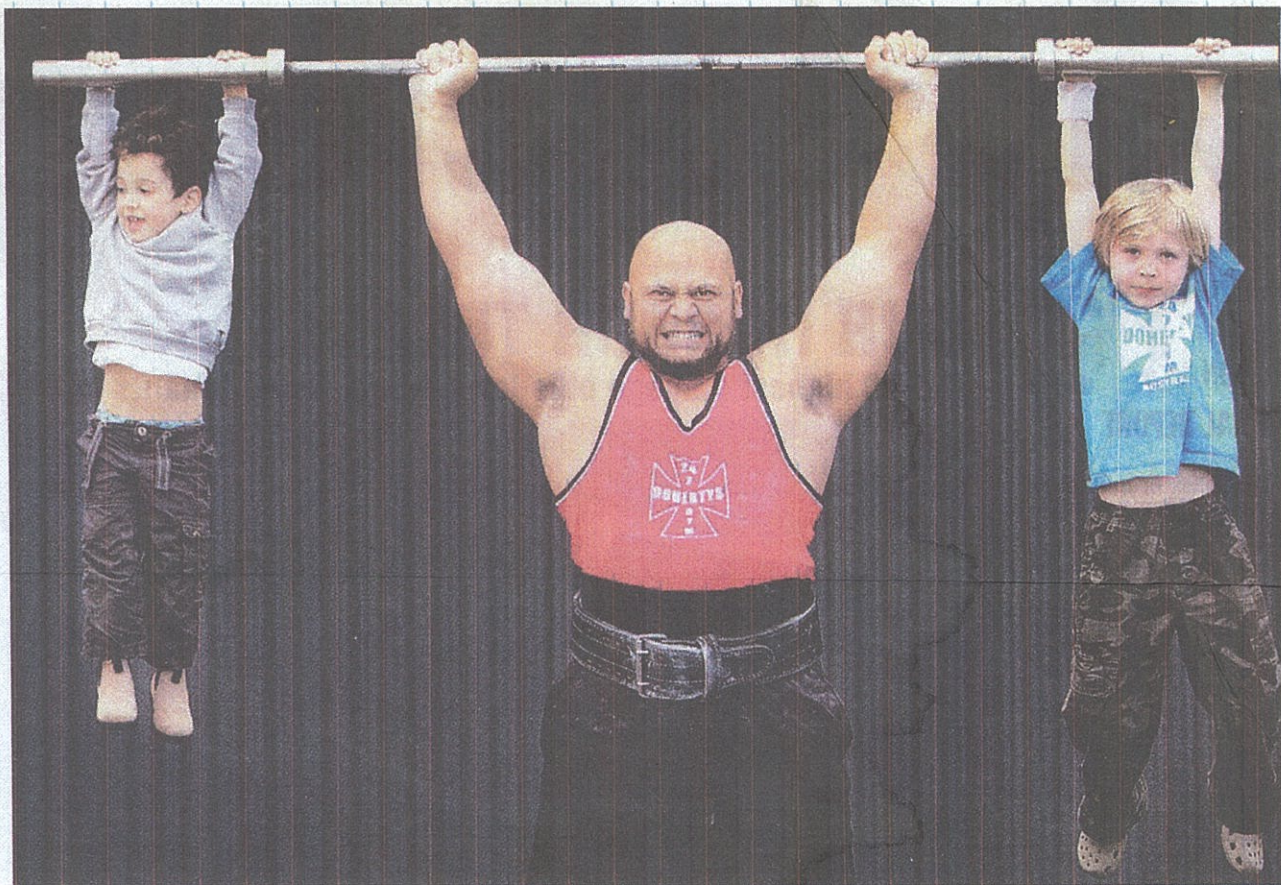
Even he does a bit of bodyguarding to pay the bills.

He reckons he is one of the 13 "strongest men on earth and, perhaps, who ever lived", and once carried 320kg over a 50m course in 32 seconds. Nobody argues with him, probably ever.

Gym owner Tony Doherty, whose boy Jesse, 7, can already lift 34kg, says "these are just regular guys who like to lift heavy things".

Plenty of them wear "Train or Die" T-shirts, and both seem distinct possibilities.

They haul 300kg things along a 15m course, lift 190kg stone balls to the top of



barrels and try to run with a 165kg lump of wood between their legs.

About 80 fans and friends watch them grunt, turn puce and threaten to explode from various parts. If it is painful to watch, it is worse to do.

Between events, one bloke is bleeding from the forearms. Another is rubbing his hands, looking at them in horror.

James can dead lift 270kg, almost triple his body weight, but the lightweight lifter has no tickets on himself.

"This is probably the pinnacle for me," he says humbly, but it turns out it isn't.

On his last lift of the day, he gets a stone ball to the top of a barrel — and himself to Wodonga.



Above: Derek "Thunder" Boyer gives Jacob and Jesse a lift and the strain tells on James Grahame's face, left.