



**Retiring:** house shifter Joe Bowen, of Maryborough. Picture: JOHN HART

# Joe's life's a moving experience

By **MIKE EDMONDS**

**JOE** Bowen of Maryborough in central Victoria has moved house about 2500 times in his life.

Hundreds of people in Maryborough, including a good half dozen in his own street, are living in houses Mr Bowen, 70 in November, has moved.

Apart from houses, he has also moved shearing sheds, barns, silos and even shops in the business he started with his grandfather and father more than 50 years ago.

The family business has moved houses from Victoria's Mallee district, from way out the back of Broken Hill and from as far away as Robe in South Australia.

When the Tullamarine Freeway was being built, Mr Bowen, his dad and his brothers were busy for months, picking up houses in the path of the freeway and carting them all over the state.

It makes sense that Maryborough should be the centre of Victoria's house-shifting industry, because in 1950 the old Housing Commission began prefabricating homes in the town. It built about 4000 over the years and had them shifted all over the state.



In five hours Mr Bowen could have a brand new house on site anywhere in the state from the factory door.

"I started in 1945 as the billy-boy making the tea for my dad and the gang," he said.

**‘There's nothing you can't move, even brick veneers’**

"Then I did a boiler-making apprenticeship with the railways, but came back and kept shifting houses.

"My grandfather started the business with an old traction engine, but the truck we're using now is a 1951 International and I reckon she's clocked up over a million miles with buildings on the trailer."

Mr Bowen said buying an old home and moving it where you want is still a viable way of getting a house, despite the current low interest rates.

"Young people these days don't realise they can get themselves set up in a house for \$30,000 or \$40,000 total if they want to," he said.

"And we can also tailor them a bit, like when we put new stumps in we always ask where they want the heavy duty stumps to go underneath and it's nearly always the bedroom.

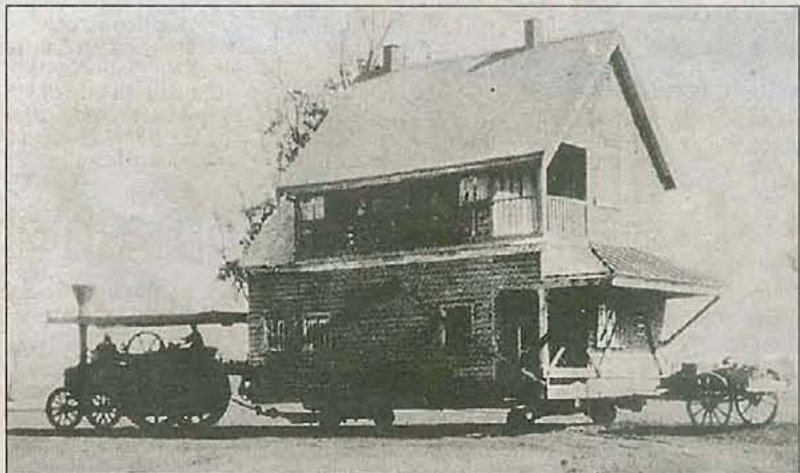
"The hardest one we did was a double-storey joint, but the bottom floor was shot to buggery so we just took the top floor off and moved it to the new block where it was turned into a granny flat."

Mr Bowen said one family near Maryborough had used his gear to shift 15 or 20 houses and sheds on and off their property.

"There's nothing you can't move, even brick veneers."

But time is catching up with Joe Bowen and his old truck.

"Me back's gone ratty, she's finished, so at last I've learned to say no, and in two more jobs I'll be packing it in," he said.



**Wide load:** wood-fired tractors were used to move the houses.