

Notes from my tasting room, March 1999

Come try 23 beers from eight countries

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UNITED STATES

Triple Mash Ultra, from the Cirque Brewery, Prosser, Wash. This brewery has already been mentioned in Notes from the Road, and has since sent this sample to me. Full gold to bronze. Dense, creamy, head. Fragrant, fresh, spicy, hop aroma. Firm, smooth, clean, malt background. The maltiness is fruity and creamy. Very dry, junipery, cedary, finish. A clean, very smooth, very firm, lager with a powerful hop bitterness in the finish.

Wicked Springfest, from the Pete's Brewing Company, Palo Alto, Calif. This beer is sub-titled as an amber Bock. It has a deep amber-red color, and my sample gushed slightly. It was lightly toffeeish and prune-y, with hints of vanilla. Chocolatey dryness in a smooth, long, finish. Not as warming as might have expected from a Bock.

Raspberry Tart, from the New Glarus Brewery, Wis. This brewery, in the town of the same name, has been discussed in several of my articles and books, but this is a new beer. The label mentions Wisconsin wheat, (deliberately aged) year-old Hallertau hops, Oregon raspberries and spontaneous fermentation in large oak vats. The beer has a very dark tawny color, with a pink tinge; a dense, creamy, head; a fresh, fragrant, sweet, raspberry aroma; a rich body that is almost blancmange-like; and a palate that is peppery, then sweet, with a fruity acidity in the finish. I would serve it cold, in a champagne flute, as an aperitif. Or lightly chilled as a dessert beer.

Beerline Barley Wine, from the Lakefront Brewery, Milwaukee, Wis. A warming example of the classic English style of strong ale, from one of my favorite U.S. micros. Russet to dark brown color. Leafy, herbal, hop aroma. Slightly gritty texture. Fruity (fig-like?), nutty, flavors. Cough syrup in a spicy, intensely dry, finish.

Alpha King Pale Ale, from the Three Floyds Brewing Company, Hammond, Ind. This was a bottled version, produced under licence at the old Rhomberg/Star brewery, in Dubuque, Iowa. It was left at my local in London by a visiting American, Kevin Cox, From Muncie, Indiana. The beer had an attractive orange colour, and poured with a huge, rocky, head, that was extraordinarily well retained. Very good hops aroma - earthy, resin-y and fruity. Gritty, grapefruit-skin, bitterness. Heady hoppiness as the beer slipped down. Hops oils and rich

maltiness. Quinine-like bitterness in the finish. This beer had been filtered, bottled, pasteurised, carried across the Atlantic in luggage, and left in the pub for a month while I was away travelling. After all that, it was still terrific. I enjoyed this brewery's beers at the Real Ale Festival in Chicago last October, and have admired them for some years. This rave review is long overdue.

Samuel Adams Spring Ale, from the Boston Beer Co. The neck label identifies this as a "rich golden ale brewed in the classic K lsch style...complex and flavorful. Hopped with Spalt-Spalt and Kent Goldings." K lsch is the style of golden ale local to Cologne, Germany. A true K lsch is not rich at all, but delicate. Despite the copywriter's nonsense, this is not a bad shot at the style, as one might expect from Sam Adams. Medium gold, with a dense head and fine bead. Perfumy-spicy (vanilla? lemon?) hop character in a very fresh, appetising aroma. Delicate dryness of palate, with light hop on the tongue. Firm body, quickly softening into spritziness. Crisp. lively finish. both refreshing and appetising..

Hard Hat American Beer, from the American Brewing Company, Melbourne, Fla. "Not Recommended for Ladies of Superior Social Position," says the label. This is, I am told, a joke. Presumably so is the suggestion that this is "Industrial Grade" beer. This is not as dumb as it sounds, but it is hardly macho (beers that affect masculinity never are). A golden brew tasting as though it was made with an ale yeast; talc-like aroma, with a hint of perfume (a touch effeminate); light-ish, carbonic; a slightly syrupy-sweet start, developing some attenuated dryness; citric, American hop, character in the finish; then a quick spritz and it's all over. I don't think it would satisfy any woman I have ever known.

ENGLAND

Millennium Ale, 8.5 per cent alcohol by volume, from the Mansfield Brewery, England. This beer is not intended to be consumed until next New Year's but I could not wait. The bottle comes in a handsome gift tin. The brewery, in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, has never had a glamorous image, but has done good work in recent years. Deep gold to bronze color. Clean, creamy, malt aroma. Soft, smooth, malty palate, with the faintest image of rum. Late hints clean dessert apple. Very late, delicate, hoppy dryness. Soothing, warming, alcohol. An astonishingly drinkable, delicate beer for its strength. Can it really be big enough to last the course?

Six more from England, all from the **Tolly Cobbold** brewery, of Ipswich:

Cobbold IPA 4.2v. Full gold to bronze; good dense head; English hop aroma; dry palate, with good hop flavours, developing to a late, crisp punch of bitterness. Very appetising indeed.

Celebration Ale (to mark 175 years of the Royal National Lifeboat Institution) 4.6v; dark orange; fruity aroma; very nutty, crystal malt, character, with a hint of vanilla pods. Licorice-like maltiness balanced by leafy hop. Very smooth-bodied and sustaining.

Countdown 5v. Medium to full amber. Dry, slight garden mint, hop aroma. Firm, smooth, body. Toasty, dry, palate. Crisp finish, with balancing fruity, citric (limes?) hop acidity. Very drinkable.

Cobbold's Cardinal Ale 5.2v Full gold. Very dense head. Dryish, creamy, aroma. Very crisp and clean. Estery (peachy?) fruitiness. Lightly creamy maltiness. Clean hop bitterness in a firm, long, dry, finish. Cleansing and refreshing.

Cobnut Special Nut Brown Ale 4.2v Chestnut to dark brown. Light bodied, but with a malty, figgy, intensity of flavor. Coffee-essence finish. Dryish. Restorative.

Old Strong Porter 6v (tasted three months past sell-by date). Dense head. Ebony color. Raisiny aroma. Raisiny, rummy, palate. Black chocolate in the finish. Smooth. Soothing.

FRANCE

La Wambrechies 7.5 v. A strong ale with the juniper character of the jenever gin made in the Low Countries. Named in honour of the Claeyssens' distillery at Wambrechies, near Lille, on the French side of the border with Belgium. This unspoiled 1817 establishment has recently been acquired by Grandes Distilleries of Charleroi, on the Belgian side. They have produced this beer in cooperation with the Du Bocq brewery, of Purnode, Belgium. It is gold in color, with a dense head; a distinctive dry fruitiness in the aroma; a very dry, flowery, spritzy, palate; and a big finish, with briar-like, oily, flavors and warming alcohol. The beer world's answer to a gin-and-tonic.

LUXEMBOURG

Gambrinus, from the Battin Brewery, in Esch/Alzette, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. A pale lager of 5.2v. Pours with a big, creamy, head; dry, hoppy, aroma; smooth, slightly sticky, body; very perfumy, rather, sweet, palate; but nice balance of crisp, hoppy dryness in the finish.

Régál, from the Simon Brewery, Wiltz, Luxembourg. A pale, all-malt, lager of 5.5v. Full gold. Very lively. Smooth. Sweetish. Some buttered-popcorn aroma and flavor (diacetyl, for the technically-minded). This characteristic is more appropriate in an ale than lager.

GERMANY

Vetter 33. The figure represents degrees Plato. This beer claims to have the highest original gravity in the world, though I can think of several bigger brews. Vetter is a famous brewpub in Heidelberg, Germany. This beer, in broadly the style of Double Bock, has a very big, dark, head; a ruby to brown color; a sappy aroma, with suggestions of cinnamon and figs; a creamy, velvety, texture; a coffeeish, fruity, palate, with a good balancing dryness; developing toward an almondy bitterness in a long finish.

CHINA

Shanghai Imported Beer 4.7v. Sent to me by a public relation company in London. The beer is made in Shanghai by a subsidiary of the Australian brewery Foster's. This Chinese lager has a hint of hop in the aroma, hop on nose; a lightly creamy, very sweet, firm middle; and a balancing touch of dry spiciness in the finish. Not much dimension.

AUSTRALIA

Longbrew Lager, 4.5v. From the Hahn brewery, near Sydney, Australia. This bills itself a "full-strength" lager "brewed" longer to have "great" taste but be less filling. Where have I heard those sort of claims before? It is a firm, smooth, brew, starting with a fruity sweetness, finishing slightly astringently dry and a little empty.

NEW ZEALAND

Three from **Australis**, of Auckland, New Zealand:

Hodgson India Pale Ale 6.3v. named for the London brewer who first produced a pale ale, in the 1700s. No one can be sure how the beers tasted then, but this is a serious attempt to be as authentic as possible. All three of this Australis series are bottled as "real ale" on lees (yeast sediment). This one has a pinkish amber color, with a faint haze; an earthy, wool-like, cedary, English hop aroma; a firm malt background, with hints of vanilla pod; and a rooty, peppery finish. Tastes remarkably like a draught real ale - very satisfying, without being at all satiating.

Benediction Belgian-style Abbey Ale 8.7v. Dark orange color, similar to that of Orval. Woody aroma (hops, rather than *brettanomyces*?). Smooth. Bone dry. Orange-peel flavors. Reminiscent of Orval and Chimay White in its long, lingering, dryness, but maltier and richer than either. Very appetising indeed.

Romanov Baltic Stout 7.8v. Appropriately big, black and tar-like. Pepper and cream in the aroma. Toffee, burnt notes, and coffee among the tightly-combined flavors in the palate. Oily, clinging and dry. Like Turkish coffee laced with Polish vodka. Very warming.

More on the Australis beers next month.

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