

How a Mild beat the Bitters

The inside story on the Champion Beer of Britain

Great beer need not be high in alcohol. In the blindfold judging at the Great British Beer Festival, at Olympia, London, this week, the Supreme Champion was the least strong of all the finalists. It was a Mild Ale: Black Cat (3.4 per cent alcohol by volume; 2.75 by weight), from the [Moorhouse's Brewery](#), of Burnley, Lancashire.

I was a judge, and several festival-goers asked me how such a gentle beer beat some much bigger brews. For myself, I loved its distinctively purply-ruby color; chocolatey aroma; and oily fullness of palate; but found its roasty dryness of finish slightly astringent. My fellow-panellists did not share that last slight reservation, and we all greatly admired its depth and length of flavours.

"Lovely body," said Graham Chinn, chairman of the Campaign for Real Ale's Greater Manchester tasting panel. Most people noted the balancing dryness of finish. "Lovely bitterness," added my fellow writer [Roger Protz](#). "Perhaps a slightly tart finish?" suggested radio broadcaster and beer lover Nigel Bardon. "Peaty" was a yet more precise verdict from Mattt Wilson (she really does sell her name with three t's). Mattt is a professional specialist in flavours, but she works on mouthwashes and toothpastes, with Procter and Gamble. "More-ish," pronounced David Rae, from the Leicester brewery Everards.

Six beers were appraised in the final round. They emerged from a preliminary round at the festival in which about 40 brews had been judged. They had been put forward by regional tasting panels.

The overall Silver Medal went to the [Hog's Back Brewery](#), which is on a farm in Tongham, Surrey, for its Traditional English Ale (4.2abv). popularly known by the acronym TEA). This is a malty, fruity, interpretation of a Best Bitter. I liked its orangey color; strawberry-ish aroma; and creamy palate. Nigel loved the aroma: "It makes me want to dive into the glass". Graham and Mattt both worried that its sweetness was on the edge of being cloying. Roger found a balance in hop resins and an underlying bitterness. "The flavours all combine so well in the finish," he concluded, indicating strong support for this beer

The overall bronze was won by the York Brewery, from the city of the same name. Its entrant was a Best Bitter called Yorkshire Terrier (4.2abv). This had a greeny-gold color, "gorgeous aroma - Maynard's Wine Gums" (Roger Protz); "intense fruitiness" (Graham Chinn); "cleansing attack, really full favors and long, bitter, finish" (Michael Jackson); "a lot happening" (Nigel Bardon). I particular liked that one.

Also judged in the final round were two joint the winners of the category for lower-gravity Bitters and the winner of the Strong Bitters category. In the lower-gravity category, the renowned Brakspear's Bitter (3.4abv), from Henley, near London, lived up to its name. I enjoyed its long, lingering, appetising, bitterness, but it was thought to lack complexity. One panellist found it "brutish". I also like the peppery drynesss of Bullmastiff Gold (3.8abv), from Cardiff, Wales, but the consensus was that it lacked length. The Strong Bitter was Monkman's Slaughter (6.0abv), from the Cropton Brewery, near Pickering, Yorkshire. This rich, medicinal, warming brew, seemed more of an Old Ale to me.

Published: AUG 2, 2000

In: Beer Hunter Online