



## Beer of the Month Club

December 2005 Selections

Happy Holidays, and welcome to all of our new Beer Club Members!

This month, we have a pair of shockingly strong winter ales to warm yourselves by the fire with...

### Scaldis Noël

Brasserie Dubuisson Freres, Pipaix, Hainault, Belgium

~12.0%abv \$4.75/250ml

The Dubuisson family brewery was founded in 1769 in the small border town of Pipaix, in the French speaking region of Wallonia, near the French city of Lille. Their most famous product, Bush beer (Dubuisson is French for bush), was introduced in 1933, at a time when British ales were very popular in Belgium. Bush is essentially a barleywine-style ale, although the Belgians tend not to use that British terminology, and it is a bit dryer than most barley wines. When the Dubuisson family began exporting to the United States in the early 1980's, they were forced to rename the beer for the American market due to the fact that there was already a Busch beer here – although it is hard to believe anyone could get the two products confused. They eventually settled on the name Scaldis, the Latin name for the Scheldt river that runs past the brewery.

In 1991, Dubuisson added a Christmas ale to their lineup, called Scaldis Noël. It is brewed in very much the same way as the original Scaldis, using three different malts, candy sugar, and three hops in the brewing process. The fermentation takes place at very high temperatures using a succession of yeasts to completely ferment all available sugars naturally – no freezing or evaporation is used to attain such high strength. The ale is then conditioned at very low temperature (around 40°F) on whole hop flowers for a period of at least four weeks. The beer is filtered, but not Pasteurized, before bottling, and it is not bottle-conditioned, so it will not pitch sediment the way most of our Belgian selections do, but it is still able to age for up to two years due to its inherent strength. To best appreciate its massive flavor profile, the Scaldis Noël should be enjoyed at or near room temperature from a small brandy snifter or similar glass.

The Scaldis Noël has a brilliant, reddish-copper color in the glass, and a vibrant, off-white head that dissipates fairly quickly but leaves a nice lace in the glass. The aromas are mostly sweet and fruity, with hints of tropical fruits and a touch of burnt caramel or toast in the background. The palate, too, has a lot of sweet fruit notes, very reminiscent of a fine brandy. The beer is surprisingly drinkable for its strength, however, without the kind of cloying sweetness that one commonly finds in such strong beers. While the hops are far from being the dominant part of the flavor profile, they do make themselves known with just a small kick of crisp citrus character at the back of the palate. While the Dubuissons recommend Scaldis as an aperitif, I tend to prefer it as an after dinner drink, as a lighter option when brandy or whiskey just seems too much.

## **Aventinus Eisbock**

**Privatbrauerei G. Schneider & Sohn, Kelheim, Bavaria, Germany**

**~12.0%abv \$4.75/330ml**

From the time of the late middle-ages, the brewing of wheat beers in southern Germany was restricted to the royal families of Bavaria and other surrounding principalities. Wheat was considered at the time to be a finer (and, therefore, more expensive) grain than barley, oats or spelt, and its consumption as food or beverage was restricted to royalty and the very wealthy. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the brewing and consumption of wheat beers (*Weissbier* in German) had fallen out of favor as brewers pursued the new-fangled lager-style beers recently introduced from Bohemia. So, in 1856, one George Schneider was granted the sole license to brew *Weissbier* in Bavaria. Shortly thereafter, the Schneiders purchased the brewery in Kelheim where they continue to brew today. The brewery had a history of brewing wheat beers going back to at least 1609, but by this time it was the last of its kind. Over the succeeding years, George and his son, George II, opened or purchased several other breweries around Bavaria, all of which were dedicated to the brewing of traditional *Weissbier*. Around the turn of the twentieth century, however, wheat beers fell out of favor with the drinking public, and all but two of the Schneider's breweries were either closed or turned over to the production of other styles of beer. By the time Bavarian *Weissbier* began to make a bit of a comeback, in the late 1960's, Schneider & Sohn were the last brewers still practicing this ancient art. By the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, wheat beers had made their full comeback, and are in fact the beer style most associated with Bavaria today, with the possible exception of the Märzen-style Oktoberfest beers of the autumn season. Now operated by George Scheider VI, Schneider & Sohn are one of Germany's oldest family owned breweries.

Like many other Bavarian breweries, Schneider are known for their famous *Hefe-weissen*, or unfiltered wheat beer. Their most famous product, however, has long been the wheat double-bock, called Aventinus. Considered to be the very best of its sort, the Aventinus has been treasured and sought out by beer lovers since its inception in 1907. Our Aventinus Eisbock is a rather new re-creation of an accident that happened some time in the late 1930's. During that era, Schneider's beers were shipped around southern Germany in wagons or trucks without the aid of temperature control, and during one particularly cold winter several of their shipments were frozen in route. When the kegs of beer arrived on site and were tapped, it was found that excess water content in the beer had been frozen and remained as a layer of ice within the keg. The beer itself, however, remained liquid, due to its already high alcohol content, and the resulting super-concentrated version of the Aventinus was an amazing elixir. After a few years of trying to replicate this process, both naturally and in the brewery, it was given up as a freak of nature, and forgotten about for more than two generations. Then, beginning in 2001, brewmaster Hans Peter Drexler began toying with several new processes, trying once again to replicate the infamous eisbock of the 1930's. After much experimentation, Herr Drexler finally succeeded in jury-rigging an ice sleeve on one of their holding tanks, freezing a layer of water on the inside of the tank, and concentrating the beer inside. With a bit of tinkering to make the process repeatable, Aventinus Eisbock, a suped-up version of their already heady Doublebock (12% alcohol vs. the 8% of the original) was introduced to the world with the 2003 vintage. The beer is brewed using 60% wheat, and the remainder a mix of pale, crystal (a proprietary crystal, known as Caramalt), and dark malts, lightly balanced by Hallertau hops and hop extract. This beer is bottle conditioned, and may pour a bit cloudy, but this will not adversely affect the flavor profile. Drink your Eisbock moderately chilled from a small red wine glass or brandy snifter to get the full effect of its concentrated personality.

The Aventinus Eisbock pours with a slightly cloudy mahogany color. While there is little or no head on the standing beer, a quick swirl of the glass will produce a light rush of very small bubbles, which then dissipate quite quickly. The aromas are sweet and malty, with hints of toffee and chocolate, and just a hint of spicy clove that is common to many Bavarian wheat beers. The palate features lots of rich, toasty grain flavors, chocolate and caramel, and hints of dried fruits, somewhat reminiscent of Christmas pudding or an Italian *panettone*, but the finish is much drier than one might expect, with just a kick of bitterness from the hops. While this beer may be a bit too strong for most food pairings, it would match nicely to richer cheeses and Holiday sweets that feature dried fruits and spices.