



## Beer of the Month Club

February 2006 Selections

### Slipknot Imperial IPA

Full Sail Brewing, Hood River, Oregon

7.8%abv      \$3.75/22oz

In 1987, a group of beer loving windsurfers discovered an old abandoned cannery overlooking the Columbia River in the small town of Hood River, Oregon. It had been some fifteen years since the cannery had closed, and the only residents at the time were pigeons and ghosts (they still refer to the building as the “haunted Technicolor pigeon cannery”). At a time when the microbrewing industry was in its infancy, and most new breweries were built using converted dairy tanks and other homemade brewing equipment, the founders of Full Sail invested in entirely new, state-of-the-art brewing equipment, and began brewing operations in September of that year. At years end, they had produced and sold a whopping 287 barrels of beer – barely a drop in the bucket, really, but it was a start. In 1988, Full Sail became one of the first microbreweries to put their own beer in bottle, even though their friends in the industry said it was madness to attempt at their level of production, and every bottle had to be filled and capped by hand. But the folks at Full Sail had a dream of seeing their beer available on the shelves of local shops, providing an alternative to their neighbors to the usual assortment of mass-produced lagers. By the late 1990’s Full Sail had become one of the largest micros (*Macro?* Certainly not yet *mega!*) in the country, and they set their eyes on a new goal: in 1999, Full Sail became entirely employee owned.

Having increased their production considerably over the years, Brewmaster John Harris decided to create a line of small-batch, limited edition ales for their best customers, and thus the Brewmaster’s Reserve Program was born. They have an array of different ales available in very limited quantity, released at different times of year, and the Slipknot Imperial IPA is their early spring release. Of the forty (yes, just 40!) cases that made it to the Bay Area, our Beer Club will consume slightly more than half. The Slipknot is a classic Double, or Imperial, India Pale Ale, being brewed with twice the normal amount of both malt and hops for a fuller, more intense beer. It is brewed using pale, crystal and Munich malts; and Warrior, Simcoe, Crystal and Centennial hops to add bitterness and aroma. Unlike many of the domestic microbrews that we have featured in recent times, the Slipknot is filtered, and should be consumed in the next six months or so. Drink your Slipknot from a classic pint glass, and start with it very well chilled, but allow it to come up in temperature while you drink it to enjoy the different flavors and aromas that develop as it changes temperature.

The Slipknot IIPA is crystal clear, and has a deep amber-orange color in the glass. The head is cream-colored and somewhat rocky, but settles quickly, and leaves a nice bead on the glass. The aromas are both intensely malty and brightly fruity at the same time, serving notice that this is no wimpy little beer. On the palate, there is an initial rush of toasty grain and malt flavors, followed almost immediately with a burst of citrusy, bitter hops. The fruitiness of the nose is not echoed as deeply in the palate, probably due to the use of an English ale yeast rather than the more fruity and floral Belgian yeast strains, but there is plenty of bright, crisp, citrusy hop character to balance the intensity of the malt. The finish is long and appropriately bitter, with flashes of citrus zest and herbaceous hops. I find that the aroma hops are most noticeable when the beer is very cold, and as it warms up the bittering hops become more dominant. Try this classic English-style ale with something suitably British, such as Bangers & Mash or a good, homemade meat pie.

## Saison 7

Farmhouse Brewing Company, Gilroy, California

6.8%abv      \$3.75/22oz

The Farmhouse line of ales are new products from Coast Range Brewing Co. in Gilroy, California. Coast Range was founded in 1995 as a draft-only microbrewery, selling their beers in keg to a selection of local pubs, restaurants and retailers. At first, they had a hard time making their business plan work, partially due to the fact that they had no taproom of their own to feature their beers. As a result, Brewmaster and partner Peter Licht took on an array of custom brewing clients, producing everything from 'House' beers for various restaurants and pubs to a selection of hard teas and soft drinks for dining establishments and other breweries. Once the cash flow situation improved, Peter was able to rededicate himself to his own line of products, and the Farmhouse ales are the result.

Gilroy is world famous for its garlic these days, but historically speaking, it was hay and grains that supported the farming community, so having Gilroy as the home base for the Farmhouse brand, and their Saison in particular, is quite appropriate. The Saison, as a style of beer, comes from the region of Wallonia in western Belgium, as well as the adjacent parts of France to the west. Traditionally, these ales were brewed just after the seasons' grains had been harvested, but they were intended to be consumed during the growing season of the following year. As a result, they had to be strong enough to survive aging for six to nine months, but not too strong for a working farmer to enjoy one with the midday meal without losing his ability to work the rest of the afternoon. Since they had to be cellared for months, the beers are usually not filtered, which results in a cloudy appearance. But it is these live yeast cells that make the beer so age worthy.

Saison ales are traditionally brewed with spices, usually dried Curaçao orange peel and coriander seed, but any number of other spices and herbs may also be used. The Farmhouse Saison 7 is brewed using both barley malt and wheat, which is also traditional, as well as hops, orange peel, and cilantro. Now, in these parts of the world, we use the name cilantro to indicate the soft, green leafy part of the plant, and coriander to indicate the seeds – which are used in Belgian saisons. Whether Peter is actually using the leafy part of the plant, or has just chosen to use the California/Hispanic name for the seeds is an answer that I could not get for you, but there is an undeniable herbaciousness to the finished ale, so it wouldn't surprise me if cilantro was used. These beers are usually very lightly hopped, just enough for preservation, while the other ingredients provide the backbone of the flavor profile. The '7' in the name 'Saison 7' is a reference to Peter's lucky brewing tank #7. For best enjoyment, we recommend drinking the Farmhouse Saison fairly well chilled, about 40-45°F, from a wine glass or other tulip-shaped vessel.

The Saison 7 pours into the glass with a very fine, active white head that lasts quite long, and replenishes itself with a quick swirl of the glass. The ale is deep gold in color, with hints of orange, and a slight haze that is the sign of bottle-conditioned ale. The aroma is both fruity and spicy, featuring the great fruit complexity that only comes from Belgian ale yeasts, and a big kick of peppery spices from the cilantro and orange peel. The palate is very rich, almost full-bodied, and with very fine carbonation that just tickles the tongue. Flavors of dried citrus and spiced fruits cascade across the palate, finishing with hints of toasted brown spice and, once again, a bit of pepper. The finish is quite long and mouth-watering, just begging for another sip. Saisons are the traditional lunch time beer for harvest season, and a farmers' lunch of bread, cheese and a hunk of sausage or paté would be the classic pairing, but we love a good Saison with seafood sautéed in butter and fresh herbs as well.