



Beer of the Month Club

February 2007 Selections

Never have I had such an adventure in trying to get information on the Beer selections for our Club. Beer number one comes from a very well-known California microbrewery, but one with a website severely lacking in information. When I finally called the brewery directly, I was immediately put on the phone with the owner and brewmaster, much to my surprise. However, when I hung up the phone twenty minutes later, I was amused, entertained, a little confused, and found that I had received very little usable information! I'm not sure if Tony Magee is a gentleman philosopher or brewing wizard, but he sure is entertaining – and he makes good beer. Beer number two has a murky history, and even after much research, I am still a bit confused as to its true origins, but more on that later...

Lucky #13

Lagunitas Brewing Company, Petaluma, California

8.3%abv \$3.50/22oz

Like many of the younger American microbreweries that we have featured over the years, Lagunitas Brewing Company began as the hobby of a home-brewer. Founder Tony Magee was working as a marketer in the printing industry, and brewing for himself at home on the weekends. However, being an experimental sort of guy, he was soon producing far more beer than he could consume, so he began giving it away to friends and family. When the positive feedback started rolling in, Tony decided to forego his paying job, and pursue brewing as a lifestyle. At first, no one in Tony's sphere of influence thought this was as good of an idea as Tony did, especially his wife, Carissa, but since she is now the operations manager for the brewery, he seems to have won her over. The brewery began in 1993 in Tony and Carissa's garage, in the town of Lagunitas, but within a year they had moved to a slightly larger, purpose-built facility in nearby Forest Knolls. By the end of 1994 they had outgrown that space, and they then relocated to the town of Petaluma, where the brewery exists today. Being a brewery without a pub, the toughest thing for Lagunitas has been, from the start, marketing their wares. Thankfully, Tony has an unusual sense of humor, and this, combined with his experience in marketing, has led to a series of brews with as much humor in packaging as skill in brewing, including a recently begun series of Frank Zappa tribute beers, as well as their 'Undercover Investigation Shut-Down Ale', which was prompted by a 20-day suspension of Lagunitas' brewing license following a visit by the BATF, when the Feds found a bit too much – ahem – 'smoking' on the brewery's patio during a public party.

The thirteenth is kind of an odd anniversary to celebrate with a special beer, but as 2006 wound down, the Magees found that it had been their most successful year to date, and decided to celebrate this fact with an anniversary ale of epic proportions, Lucky #13. Lagunitas' first beer was a red ale, one that developed over the years into what they now call their 'Imperial Red', a nod to the strength and extra hoppiness that have evolved over the years. Lucky #13 is an amalgam of their Imperial Red and 'Hairy Eyeball', their barleywine-style ale. It is brewed using a selection of assorted crystal malts, plus chocolate malt for added body and color. Amarillo hops are used in the boil, and the beer is dry-hopped with Cascade, Willamette and Liberty hops. A proprietary house yeast is used, along with local well and reservoir water. Drink your Lucky #13 slightly chilled, around 45-50°F, from a pint glass, to fully enjoy its aromas and flavors.

The Lucky #13 pours into the glass with a crystal-clear, reddish-copper color, and a lacy beige head that dissipates fairly quickly, but promptly returns with a swirl of the glass. The nose predominately shows sweet, fruity malt notes, but hints of resinous, citrusy hops are also evident. The palate is both dryer than the

nose suggests, and surprisingly light and lithe, considering the powerful aromas. Dry, spicy grains cascade across the palate, showing little of the sweeter malt notes from the nose, but delivering plenty of pit and citrus fruits, along with yeasty brown bread notes, and a hint of pine or spruce. This big beer is imminently drinkable, and would make a great session beer for those that are stout of heart, but two or three glasses will begin to fog the mind, as this is one strong ale. Try it on its own, or with traditional pub fare, such as a ploughmans' lunch of bread, cheese and pickles; or meat pies in gravy.

Original Flag Porter

Darwin Brewery, Durham, England

5.0%abv \$2.75/330ml

Darwin Brewery began as an offshoot of the University of Sutherland's BrewLab, an educational test facility for Britain's brewing industry. After helping many breweries research and fine-tune their brews, BrewLab branched out, and began commercial brewing in the early 1990's, under the name Darwin Brewery. Their first commercial product, the Original Flag Porter, started with a shipwreck, of all things, but has been nothing but a success ever since. In 1988, a shipwreck dating to 1825 was discovered lying at the bottom of the English Channel in 60 feet of icy cold water. When the wreck was explored further, a shipment of ale, still in its original bottles, with wooden stoppers sealed in wax, was discovered in the hold of the ship. These bottles were sent to the BrewLab at the University of Sunderland, where brewing Professor Dr. Keith Thomas went to work in his laboratory. While the 150+ year-old ale was said to taste like "old, wet leather boots", Dr. Thomas was surprised to find that there were still live yeast cells in several bottles. After months of work in the laboratory, he was able to propagate this yeast strain into usable quantities. Next, through careful archival research, Dr. Thomas found an authentic Porter recipe dating to 1850, and set out to re-create the traditional Porters of the time. The result has been such a success that demand far exceeds the production capabilities of the Darwin Brewery, and it seems the beer is now brewed under contract by the nearby Elgood's Brewery, although the beer is clearly labeled as coming from Darwin Brewery, and neither the Darwin's nor the Elgood's websites make any mention of the brand at all. So, we'll call this the Mystery 19th Century Porter!

According to legend, a London innkeeper by the name of Ralph Harwood invented Porter around the year 1730. The style was originally a blend of three different ales that he had in cask behind the bar, blended to highlight the strengths of each, while hiding any flaws or impurities. This new style proved so popular with his clientele that he soon didn't have time to do the blending himself, so he had the brewery that supplied him with ale do the chore themselves, and deliver the ale pre-blended, in cask. He called this new creation his 'entire butt' ale (butt being an early English term for a wooden cask), and it rapidly became quite popular with the local tradesmen, especially porters from the nearby Port of London. At some point, the beer itself became known as Porter, and it was the most popular style in the British Isles and British territories overseas until the advent of refrigeration ushered in the era of lager beers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Original Flag Porter is brewed with 19th century sensibilities, using only malt and hops that are grown without the aid of artificial fertilizers, insecticides or other 20th century technologies. It is brewed using a variety of British-grown specialty malts, mostly roasted to the chocolate or black level, but with just enough crystal malts to provide lightness of body, and just enough hops to provide a balancing bitterness. It is brewed using the original 1825 yeast strain, and local well water. The finished product is slightly sweet, which is authentic to the time, although considerably sweeter than most modern renditions of the style. Drink this beer barely chilled, from a red wine glass or ale goblet, to get the fullest enjoyment.

The Original Flag Porter comes out of the bottle a little darker than a fine root beer, with a lacy and short-lived tan head. It smells absolutely delicious, with big wafts of dark chocolate, espresso, molasses and spice cake jumping from the glass. The palate is dryer than the nose suggests, however, but it still shows copious chocolate and mocha notes as it glides lightly across the tongue. The finish is rich and slightly sweet, and makes a natural accompaniment to roast game, strong sharp cheeses, and, of course, dessert.