



February 2009

February has long been a great month for beer aficionados in the Bay Area. With Strong Beer Month at various venues, the Double IPA festival at the Bistro and of course the legendary Barleywine Festival at Toronado, there were plenty of options for enjoying the typically rain soaked month. This year was the first for SF Beer Week, a series of daily events all around the Bay Area. By all reports, this was a wild success and we're already looking forward to next year. In the spirit of big beers and creativity, we have two to keep you warm.

Gordon Ale

Oskar Blues Brewery LLC, Lyon, Colorado

8.7%abv \$11.99/4x12oz cans

Long time club members might be thinking we're obsessed with cans. This is our third selection since July that arrives to you via an aluminum vessel. In our never-ending quest to find quality and interesting things for you, we're happy to now have the products of Oskar Blues, the first micro in a can (a bit more on that later).

Oskar Blues, located between Boulder and Fort Collins north of Denver, was founded in 1997 as a restaurant serving Cajun inspired southern food. At the time, it was called Oskar Blues and Brews until a customer pointed out that there wasn't brewing going on. Point taken, the venue began producing excellent robust beers in 1999. While providing the Boulder and Lyons locals with a great place to eat and drink, it's also a destination for visitors of the nearby Rocky Mountain National Park. If you need still another reason to visit, almost every night features live blues, rock, bluegrass, Americana and country. The venue seats a cozy 100 people and has been called the 'hottest place to be on a Saturday night in Colorado' by Rolling Stone.

With a pedigree of a successful venue and great beer, the next phase is the Oskar Blues story revolves quite significantly around a simple aluminum can. The brewery received a fax from a Canadian company that manufactured a two-at-a-time hand canning device. The idea of this was seen as a joke to owner Dale Katechis, but a joke that stewed for six months until it seemed to fit the pervading mantra of keeping everything fun. In 2002, these big beers started altering people's perception of what canned beer is supposed to be. Eventually, the concept of the can as just something fun to do began to make sense on many other levels. There are a host of benefits to the can including (and not limited to): Almost zero oxygenation, no light damage, portability into places that don't allow glass, light weight for shipping, easily packed out and recycled. The can, along with its award winning content has sparked 100% growth over the last few years with beers now appearing in 17 states.

The current canned line-up consists of Dale's Pale, Old Chub Scotch Ale, TenFidy Imperial Stout and our selection simply titled, 'Gordon'. This beer was initially created as a one off tribute in honor of Gordon Knight. Knight was an accomplished brewer who is woven deeply into the micro-brewing fabric of Colorado. Passionate about brewing and about the 'start-up' mentality, he won Gold medals at the Great American Beer Festival with three different breweries. Helping with consistency, with each brewery his equipment followed him. This same equipment would eventually end up as the first for New Belgium Brewing Co. He also served as a helicopter pilot in Vietnam, a skill lent to fighting forest fires in Colorado. Sadly, at 52 years old he was killed when his helicopter went down attempting a water drop on a Rocky Mountain National Forest fire. Gordon lives on in brewing lore and thanks to a very well received initial batch, the tribute lives on in cans of great beer.

Your Gordon pours a deep golden with a crisp white head that dissipates quickly. It is billed as a hybrid of an Imperial Red and a Double IPA using six different malts, three types of hops and dry-hopped with Amarillo. The added twist to the grain bill is a small percentage of chocolate malt that does serve as a bit of additional backbone needed to sustain a bigger beer. The aroma of this clearly reflects the orange characteristics of the hopping and quite typical of the DIPAs. As for taste, this is a rich beer that is balanced by crispness in the carbonation. The hopping definitely is the dominant taste with clear elements of lemongrass, citrus and a hint of white pepper. The malting imparts just enough sweetness to round off the bitterness. At over 8%, don't let the fact that this beer is in a can fool you into thinking it's a session beer. This beer is best served in a pint glass or wider mouthed goblet to best enjoy the aroma. Feel free to serve this nice and cold allowing the malt to come through as it warms. This beer will pair nicely with Thai dishes featuring basil and citrus. And, since it's in a can, we can't rule out 99% of picnics, camping, the beach. . .



Batch One Barleywine

Amager Bryghus, Kastrup, Denmark

9.2%abv \$10.50/500ml

Over the last few years, we've been seeing excellent Scandinavian offerings available stateside. From Norway, we have Nøgne O (a previous selection of ours). From Sweden we have Nils Oscar. From Denmark, we get the whimsical beers of Mikkeller. If there is a common thread between them, it's the incorporation of worldwide influences being brought to their countrymen. An impressive feat of these breweries is the speed of their success with Nøgne O and Mikkeller founded in 2002 and 2006 respectively. The veteran in the bunch is Nils Oscar at 13 years. Our selection from Amager Bryghus is no different.

Morten Valentin Lundsback and Jacob Storm founded Amager in 2006. The brewery is located near the airport for Copenhagen in the town of Kastrup. The brewers claim that they have 'safest brewing enterprise in the world' since the brewery once served as an air raid shelter. To add an air of divinity, the facility was also a bible storage facility. The founders were passionate home-brewers who opened the facility prior to earning diplomas from the Scandinavian School of Brewing. It might be better from now on if we point out when an upstart brewery is NOT the by-product of a home-brew hobby gone to the highest level.

Amager focuses on bigger, fuller beers with a proclivity towards Imperial Stouts. With releases like "Old Imperial", "Rated XX", "Little Grumpy Man", we expect most of these beers to be good at keeping us indoors during the rain. Probably one of the more interesting titles reflects the community aspect of beer broadened by websites. "Hr. Papsø" is named after a member of www.ratebeer.com who has reached the astounding figure of rating 10,000 beers. Long time members of ratebeer themselves, Lundsback and Storm have a great network of fans worldwide. Great for potential distribution if you have a willing audience in advance!

The beer we chose is their "Batch One", a Danish barleywine. The choice fits nicely with the themes of the month as well as a month we typically have to spend more time indoors. Longer-term members will have to go back to December of 2006, for our last barleywine "Doggie Claws" from Hair of the Dog. Since it has been some time, a quick review of barleywine is in order. Barleywine is very much a beer and shares only the potential alcohol content and its ability to be aged with its wine counterpart. In fact, the ingredients are exactly the same as your standard beer. The difference is in larger volumes of malts and aggressive hopping to balance the high gravity starting point. It's not uncommon to make two separate beers from one batch of barleywine. The first runnings produce the highest gravity. The lower gravity latter runnings can produce a separate, lighter beer often referred to as 'small beer'. The color range of barleywine goes from bronze to deep brown with light carbonation resulting in a very rich body. On the tongue, the tastes can be complex and even challenging for the beer drinker used to lighter fare. Alcohol content typically ranges from 8-12% and even higher in a few cases and serving sizes tend to be on the conservative side. Thanks to the high volume of starting ingredients, barleywines can be laid down for several years and most brewers will carry a vintage or batch number. All it takes is some patience and vertical tastings are no longer limited to wine.

Batch One is very much in keeping with the rest of the Amager offering in terms of a solid malt profile featuring a significant portion of caramel malt. This is paired with Simcoe hops for the bittering and dry-hopping aroma. Simcoe is commonly referred to as an 'über' version of Cascades. The alpha acids range from 12-14%. From a bittering standpoint, the longer these alpha acids boil, the more bitter the beer. Take the same high alpha acids for dry-hopping and it produces excellent citrus aromas.

Your Batch One pours a deep copper with a well-latticed beige head that dissipates down to a fraction of an inch but remarkably remains. A beer of this heft is best served a bit warmer than refrigerator temp and into a goblet or wine glass. The aroma is very similar to the Old Ale styles of Dortmund, Germany meaning big malts that are propped up with aggressive hopping, in this case the resinous and pungent Simcoe. Where those beers tend to be a bit heavy in the nose, the dry-hopping of Batch One gives this one a bit of brightness. Like any good barleywine, Batch One will coat the palate with the best of them. Initially the taste is very sweet and rich. Further along the malts impart a mix of vanilla, ash and tobacco. All of this gives way to an intense bitterness imparted by the hops for the finish. Like many beers, the complexity of each flavor becomes more apparent as it warms. Typically this is served as an after dinner drink but it would pair very well with the caramelized topping of crème brûlée.