



Beer of the Month Club

January 2006 Selections

Moose Drool Brown Ale

Big Sky Brewing Company, Missoula, Montana

5.3%abv \$7.50/6x12oz

Brad Robinson, chief brewer and co-founder of Big Sky, discovered his love of fine beers while working as a commercial fisherman in Alaska. After long days of pulling nets from the Deep Blue, nothing went down better than the microbrews of the then fledgling Alaskan Brewing Company, it seems. Intrigued by the singularity and quality of this micro, Brad began brewing at home during the off season. After returning to the Lower 48, Brad settled in Missoula, Montana, and began looking into the possibility of turning his budding passion into a career. While Big Sky Brewing Company was conceived in 1993, the first beers weren't brewed until 1995, when he had secured a couple of partners to help spread the risk. Now far and away Montana's largest brewer, Big Sky surpassed the 25,000 barrel production mark last year, but their fine beers are new to us in Northern California. While they brew an array of beers in different styles, including several seasonal ales, Moose Drool now makes up an astonishing 70% of their total production.

The label on the Moose Drool features a scene common to wetter parts of North America – a moose withdrawing its head from a lake with a mouthful of greens. The artwork was done by partner Bjorn Nabozney's mother, and when the investors were presented with the artwork, they thought that the water streaming off the head of the moose made it look as if he was drooling, and the name stuck. While Moose Drool may not be the most appealing name, it does have a certain ring to it, and fans of the beer are many, but don't count Canada's Moosehead among them – in long-going litigation, the Canadian brewmonster insists that they own the rights to any beer with 'moose' in the name. The beer itself is essentially a classic British-style brown ale, brewed using pale, caramel, chocolate and whole black malts; and Kent Goldings, Liberty and Willamette hops. It is not a bottle conditioned ale, so it will pour crystal clear, but does not have as long of a shelf life as many of our Beer Club selections, so be sure to store it in the refrigerator. Serve the Moose Drool in a classic pint glass, and we found it to show the best array of flavors when it had been out of the cooler for ten to fifteen minutes – too cold, and you lose some of the flavor.

The Moose Drool Brown Ale pours a nice, medium-brown color with just a hint of red, and a very light and lacy, cappuccino-colored head. The aromas are of toasted grains and nuts, with just a subtle hint of fruitiness. In the mouth it has an intensely creamy texture and very fine bubbles, making for a *very* drinkable beer. The flavors echo the aromas, with notes of multi-grain toast, roasted Brazil nuts, and that fruity character that seems to drift back and forth between sweeter plum and cherry flavors from the malt and crisp citrus flavors from the hops. The finish, too, is long and creamy, and totally dry, but without any overt bitter notes. This quaffable little brown ale goes down just fine by itself, but also makes a natural pairing with grilled meats of any sort, especially wild game sausages – dare I suggest moose?!

Certified Organic Porter

Eel River Brewing Company, Fortuna, California

5.5%abv \$8.99/6x12oz

The Eel River Brewing Company was founded as a brewpub by the husband and wife team of Margaret and Ted Vivatson in 1994. Located just south of Eureka, in the Humboldt County town of Fortuna, their company slogan is “Brewed Behind the Redwood Curtain”, and the brewery itself is on the former site of an old sawmill. The pub features a bar made entirely of ‘recovered’ redwood and Douglas fir trees, and the largest outdoor beer garden in Northern California. Their beers have won more awards than any other California brewery of their size, but they also have an award-winning dinner menu that features local organic produce, and organic beef raised by the brewery for their own use. In 1999, Eel River Brewing Company became the first Certified Organic brewery in the nation. Their current production is a miniscule 3000 barrels per year, but with a brewery expansion that took place last year, they do have the capacity to increase production up to 10,000 barrels per year.

Eel River’s Porter is a classic of the style, dark and rich, but not as heavy as some, and considerably lighter than a stout, or even our own Anchor Porter. It is brewed using 100% Certified Organic ingredients, and bears the certification symbol proudly on its front label. The beer is brewed using pale, caramel, chocolate and black malts; and Northern Brewers’ hops from an organic farm in eastern Washington state. The water is from an artesian well on the brewery property. While this Porter has a fairly moderate alcohol level, we find it still performs admirably as a winter warmer all on its own, as well as pairing nicely with richer foods like plank-roasted salmon or homemade charcuterie. Like the Moose Drool above, this beer is best enjoyed when allowed to warm up just slightly from refrigerator temperature – about 45-50°F.

Eel River’s Organic Porter pours into the glass just a little bit darker than the Moose Drool, but the aromas are considerably darker. Sweet malt notes are combined with hints of molasses, coffee, sultanas, and other dried fruits. It also has more of a sense of weight and body on the palate. The flavor, though, is surprisingly dry considering the aroma, with lots of toast and coffee, dark roasted grains, and just a hint of dark fruits. The finish is medium long, dry, and very toasty, with just a bit of hop bitterness in the end. Try the Organic Porter with richer dishes like stews or braised meats, or with a classic ploughman’s lunch: a chunk of dark bread, a piece of sharp cheese, and an assortment of pickled vegetables.