



## Beer of the Month Club

January 2007 Selections

Hoppy New Year!

### Calico Amber Ale

**Ballast Point Brewing Company, San Diego, California**

**5.0%abv      \$3.50/22oz**

Like many of our modern American microbreweries, Ballast Point Brewing Company began as a hobby of some enthusiastic home brewers. In 1992, Home Brew Mart was opened in San Diego, selling brewing equipment and supplies to the public, and offering their brewing expertise to home brewers looking to perfect their craft. With much demand, they eventually installed their own brewery behind the retail store in September of 1996, and began selling their beers early the following year. The brewery takes its name from a small point on Point Loma, where Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo first set foot on the West Coast of North America, in September of 1542. While Cabrillo originally named the harbor San Miguel, the name was later changed to San Diego, and in 1796 the Spanish named the point "*Punta de los Gujarrros*" (meaning point of the cobblestones) for the large stones to be found there that were the perfect size and weight to be used as ballast in their ships. The area became American territory following the Mexican-American War, and was (with all of California) made a state in 1850, following the discovery of gold up north. By the 1870's, Point Loma became the site of the United States' first naval base on the Pacific Coast, which it remains today, and Ballast Point itself became the site of the Pacific nuclear submarine base in the early 1960's.

Ballast Point's Calico Amber Ale is an Extra Special Bitter, or ESB. The Bitter is a style of ale distinct to Britain, and most breweries there will brew at least one as a part of their lineup. When more than one bitter is produced at a given brewery, the higher gravity beer will be called a 'Best Bitter', and if a third is added, it is usually called an 'Extra Special Bitter'. Here on the West Coast, where we really love our hops, breweries that produce Bitter will generally go straight to the full-throttle style. The Calico Amber Ale is brewed with a selection of British and domestic Crystal malts, with Galena and Perle hops used for bittering in the mash. Toward the end of the boil, further additions of Centennial and Cascade hops are made, to take advantage of the fresh and pungent oils that they will add to the beer, but without extracting any further bitterness. The folks at Ballast Point are a bit cheeky about the source of the yeast that they use for the Calico, only going so far as to say that a 'friend' smuggled it out of a British brewery famous for their Bitters, but the finished product certainly possesses a more British character than most domestic ESBs. Like all bitters, this should be served in a traditional pint glass, and enjoyed at what would be cellar temperature in the British Isles, around 45-50°F.

The Calico Amber Ale pours into the pint glass with a very deep, copper-amber color. The head is off-white, and fairly vigorous at first, but calms to a fine lace quite quickly. The aromas are mostly malt-driven, with toasted grains, Christmas pudding, and a slight citrus tang from the hops. On the palate, the Calico is fairly full-bodied, and quite dry, with the bitterness immediately evident. Flavors of roasted grains, red fruits, yeast, and bitter hops dominate. The fruit really makes a resurgence after the bitterness at the tail end of the palate has subsided. The dryness and bitter hop character definitely define this beer, but the overall balance and palatability are quite nice, and the extra burst of fruit in the finish really left smiles on our faces. Try the Calico Amber Ale with such traditional British pub grub as bangers and mash, fish and chips with malt vinegar, or *way* overcooked roast beast.

## **FOUR**

**Allagash Brewing Company, Portland, Maine**

**10.0%abv      \$12.00/750ml**

In the early 1990's, when Rob Tod first got involved in the brewing industry, he was intrigued by the fact that American microbrewers seemed to embrace the traditional styles of Germany and the British Isles, but no one was paying homage to the greatest and most experimental brewers of them all, the Belgians. With a brewing history going back at least 1000 years, and perfected over the centuries by monks brewing away in their monasteries, he couldn't understand why no American brewers were embracing the Belgian ideal. So, in 1994, Rob designed his own brewery in the Belgian fashion, and Allagash became the first in America to dedicate itself exclusively to Belgian-style ales. The brewery was built with the help of his father, but was run as a one man operation for the first few years. His first ale was called Allagash White, brewed in the style of the famous White (or Wit) beers of Belgium, and was the first of its kind in the US. Surprisingly, beer lovers thirsting for new experiences took to this new creature almost immediately, and Rob soon had to hire two assistant brewers just to keep up. Eventually they would add Abbey-style Double and Triple ales to their lineup, as well as small batches of other, more experimental ales – in fact, he is currently aging a new ale in barrels that were used to age Merlot and Syrah at the PlumpJack Winery! Allagash was also one of the first (if not the first) American breweries to bottle in the Belgian fashion, in 750ml cork-sealed bottles. Late last year, Allagash broke ground on a new and considerably larger brewery, and by the time you read this, they may be brewing away in their new facility.

The Allagash FOUR was one of Rob's first experimental beers to be added to the regular lineup. It began life as a beefed-up version of his regular Double ale, but with further experimentation and fine tuning, it became something altogether different. It is brewed in an amazingly complex series of steps, using four different malts (two-row, caramel, Crystal and Munich), four different hops (Saaz, Perle, Tettnenger, and Hallertauer), and four different sugars (date, light candi, dark candi, and molasses) added at different times with four different yeasts to promote four separate fermentations. This process takes several weeks, with the final fermentation happening in bottle to provide natural carbonation. Since this beer is bottle conditioned, it will pitch a good amount of spent yeast in the bottle, so you will want to let it rest for a day or two before opening, and pour gently to decant from the sediment. Like most high-gravity ales, it should be served somewhat warmer than refrigerator temperature – Rob recommends a range of 40-60°F, but I find that the FOUR shows best at the warmer end of the spectrum. Use a traditional Belgian ale goblet or a large red wine glass to make the most of the beer's complex bouquet.

The Allagash FOUR pours into the glass with a delightfully turbid orange-amber color. The head is incredibly lively, continuing to pump out fresh bubbles constantly, and leaving a beautiful lace in the glass even after it subsides. Initial aromas are quite estery, with hints of the date sugar, plus dried pit fruits and various red berries. It is very full-bodied, but surprisingly dry considering the aromatic profile, and the flavors echo the aromas, with just enough hop presence to balance the huge quantities of sweet malt. The finish echoes on the palate for several minutes. Rob recommends this to be had with grilled bacon-wrapped scallops, or mushrooms stuffed with fresh crabmeat; we agree that it would work quite well with those kinds of combined flavors, but find that it works great all on its own as a winter warmer, and pairs very well with an assortment of cheeses.