



Punk IPA

BrewDog Brewing Co., Fraserburgh, Aberdeenshire, Scotland

6.0%abv \$12.50/660ml

BrewDog is Scotland's latest and greatest microbrewery, having started brewing in April of 2007. Martin Dickie and James Watt were each only 25 years old at the time they founded the company, but both were already very accomplished home brewers. They set up shop in the small city of Fraserburgh, on the far northeast coast of Scotland, near the heart of Scotch whisky production (the Speyside region). This area is also the most important area in Scotland for growing barley, the key ingredient in both Scotch and beer, and BrewDog proudly uses Scottish malted barley exclusively. The brewery is still set up for micro-production, but the two were smart enough to set up shop in a space that will allow them future growth without having to move locations. They currently are set up with a single brewing kettle to brew in batches of only ten barrels (that's 1600 liters, or twenty US kegs per brew) at a time. With eight fermentation/conditioning tanks, this means that to keep up with current demand, they are brewing constantly, bottling as fast as they can, and rotating beers through those tanks as rapidly as possible. When Martin and James entered their very first commercial brewers competition last winter (the World Beer Awards), they took two 'Best in the World' awards for their brews, so their future is looking very rosy, indeed.

The Punk IPA is Martin and James' homage to the big, hoppy beers of America's West Coast, and as such is much hoppier than your typical British IPA. They start by brewing Scottish Crystal and pale malts. Two hops are used in the Punk, one from New Zealand for its bitterness and intense grapefruit nose, and one from the Pacific Northwest of the United States that is selected for its piney/resinous qualities. As much as they would have liked to use entirely Scottish base ingredients, the brewers found that none of the commercially available Scottish (or even other European) hops provided the intensity of hop character that they were looking for. The hops are added to the boil, and again in the fermenter (dry-hopping), to maximize extraction of the flowers' oils. A Scottish ale yeast of secret origin is used for the fermentation. The beer is lightly filtered twice for clarity, then carbonated in tank before bottling, so you will see none of the spent yeast sediment that is the hallmark of a bottle-conditioned ale, and although this means that the beer will not improve with bottle age, it is a strong enough ale to warrant about one year of shelf life should you choose to stock up. This is from Batch #1 – the very first commercial brewing of Punk IPA. I found that this IPA has a lot to offer at several different temperatures, so I suggest starting with it fully chilled to refrigerator temperature, but allowing it to warm slowly as you consume it, and follow the evolution in the glass. A classic pint glass will show this ale at its best.

Your Punk IPA will pour into the glass with a surprisingly pale lemon yellow color, and considering the fact that it is filtered, a fairly hazy appearance. The head is white, light and pillowy, and leaves a very nice lace in the glass. The aromas are initially very piney and woody, with just a touch of grapefruit and grain peeking through. On the palate, this Punk is light on its feet, belying its 6% alcohol. It has a very bright, lemony attack, with resinous hops almost immediately to the fore. There is no hint of sweetness, but citrus fruits make their appearances at various times and at various temperatures as this ale changes in the glass. The finish echoes on for minutes with strong hop character, but very mild bitterness. This is a very drinkable, summer-weight IPA that would be the perfect session beer – if it weren't for the price. Try it with classic summer BBQ fare, grilled fish, or a sunny summer afternoon ballgame.



Chupacabras Pale Ale

Cerveceria de Baja California (aka Cucapá), Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico

5.8%abv \$4.50/22oz

If your experiences have been anything like ours, you would have been quite skeptical when approached by a salesperson with the words, “I have this great Mexican beer you need to try...” But this is most definitely a different sort of Mexican beer – no pissy yellow lager here! The Garcia family founded Cerveceria de Baja California in Mexicali, Mexico, in 2002, as one of Mexico’s first brewpubs, and the first to specialize in ales. Their head brewer, Roberto Gonzales, already had a degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Baja California when he became interested in brewing. He moved to Carlsbad, California, in the early ‘00s to apprentice himself to Tomme Arthur, of Port Brewing/Lost Abbey Ales, one of this country’s most celebrated brewers, before moving home to Mexicali to take over the brewing at C.d.B.C. By the way, ‘C.d.B.C’ is the company name, but the beers themselves are branded as ‘Cucapá’, the name of the native tribe of the area. When their brewpub first opened, locals didn’t quite know what to make of their new neighbor, as they mostly thought of Mexican beer the same way we have, but it didn’t take long for them to become popular both with the local clientele, as well as tourists to the area. By 2006, there was enough demand for them to add a second brewing system and bottling line, and begin to sell packaged beers.

Around the beginning of the 1990’s, farm animals from El Salvador to the Southwest of the United States began mysteriously turning up dead and desiccated, seemingly sucked dry of all their bodily fluids. Quickly the story of the ‘Chupacabras’ began spreading, and an urban (rural?) myth had officially been born. ‘Chupacabras’ literally means ‘goat sucker’, but nobody knows for sure if this creature is an alien, a demon, or some sort of mutant predator – just that it has a taste for blood. The folks at Cucapá decided to honor this myth when they released their first pale (or is it blood red?) ale. The Chupacabras Pale Ale is brewed in the American craft brew style, using American two-row and caramel malts, and Centennial and Cascade hops from the Pacific Northwest. Owner Mario Garcia tells me that they use Colorado River water, which, due to its very high mineral content, is excellent for extracting sugars from the malt. Roberto brought the ale yeast used for fermentation with him when he left Port Brewing. Like the Punk above, this ale is lightly filtered before being carbonated in tank prior to bottling. This means that the Chupacabras should be consumed in the first four to six months of its life to ensure optimum freshness. This beer won a gold medal in the Pale Ale category at the 2007 World Beer Championships. Try this Pale Ale slightly warmer than cooler temperature, around 45°F, from a classic pint glass for best enjoyment.

The Chupacabras Pale Ale pours into the glass a rich copper color, with a fairly light head that leaves a faint lace in the glass. The aroma is bright and fruity, with stone fruits and candied citrus predominate, and a slight piney quality from the hops. It is fairly full-bodied in the mouth, with an initial bitterness that quickly turns round and fruity in the mid-palate. Hints of caramel and chocolate, as well as roasted grains, are also there. The hops kick back in at the finish, though, which is long and earthy, with excellent hop spice notes. This ale is light enough, yet has enough character to work well with spicy Mexican or Tex-Mex dishes; I especially enjoyed it with fresh grilled fish tacos.