



Beer of the Month Club

March 2007 Selections

Triple Moine

Brasserie du Bocq, Purnode, Namur, Belgium

7.2%abv \$9.99/750ml

The Brasserie du Bocq was founded in 1858, when farmer Martin Belot began brewing on his farm in the small town of Purnode. An almost immediate success, Mssr. Belot was soon delivering beer in cask to virtually every pub, restaurant and road house within a days' horse drawn wagon trip of his farm. Over the second half of the 19th century, Belot slowly increased the size and output of his brewery, eventually becoming one of the province's largest brewers. In 1949, Belot's descendants incorporated the brewing company, and began buying out other small, regional brewers. In 1960, all other farming at the property ceased, in order to concentrate on the brewing business. By 1967 they were brewing beers under a variety of brand names at no fewer than three different brewing facilities, but in 1983 a new, state-of-the-art facility was built on the original Purnode farmland, and all of their brewing activities were moved to the home brewery, where they remain today. The company is still 100% family owned, having avoided the industry consolidation that absorbed many family concerns throughout the 1980's and '90's. With exports to North America, India, and the rest of Europe, du Bocq's sales are now around \$10 million per year, making it one of Belgium's largest independent breweries, and it still has room to grow. Actually, in addition to their own line of ales, they also contract brew a number of other brands for other companies.

The Triple Moine (Triple Monk) is an Abbey Triple-style ale, referring to a style of ale invented and perfected by the Trappist monks of Belgium. While some Triples are actually fermented three times, the terms 'single', 'double' and 'triple', in terms of Belgian-style ales, is more akin to the old labeling of spirits with an 'X', 'XX', or 'XXX' in pre-literate days, and is an indicator of alcoholic strength. Generally speaking, an Abbey Triple will be fairly light gold in color, with an abundance of fruity esters, light hop character, and a slightly warming finish. The Triple Moine is brewed using a variety of pale and crystal malts from Belgium and Germany. After the grains are steeped to extract the sugars, maltose is added prior to the boil, in order to increase the amounts of fermentable material. After the boil, the wort is transferred to the fermenting tanks, where yeast is added, and a long, slow, cool fermentation takes place. After the initial fermentation, the ale is centrifuged to clarify it, then bottled with a small dose of 'candi' sugar (basically, pure sucrose) and additional yeast, for re-fermentation in the bottle. The bottled ale is then conditioned at the brewery for a period of three to four months, which allows the secondary fermentation to finish, and the beer to mellow a bit. The finished Triple Moine will cast a slight sediment as a result of this treatment, but that is a sign of a living beer, and this ale will continue to age well for three to five more years. Drink your Triple Moine slightly chilled (around 50°F) from an ale goblet or red wine glass with a wide mouth to get optimal enjoyment.

The Triple Moine pours into its glass with a brassy golden color, and a white head of very fine and active bubbles. The aromas have notes of wildflower honey, and are hugely fruity, with candied citrus, pit fruits and peach skin predominate, but just a hint of resinous hops. This is a big beer on the palate, and considerably drier than the nose would suggest. Bright malt flavors are accented by citrus and hop notes, and the beer finishes dryly fruity, with a kiss of bitter hops. Try the Triple Moine with big foods, like roast fowl, stewed seafoods, or strong cheeses

Organic Cidre Bouché Brut de Normandie, 2005

Etienne Dupont, Victot-Pontfol, Normandy, France

4.5%abv \$11.99/750ml

No one in the Dupont family is quite sure how old the family Domaine is. At some point, all records prior to the late 1880's were lost, but the family still owns a single bottle of Calvados that was bottled by current patriarch Etienne Dupont's grandfather Jules in 1890, and that brandy had been barrel aged for some time before bottling. Etienne took over operations at the Domaine in 1980, when his father retired, and is currently in the process of passing the business on to his son, Jérôme. Like most land owners in Normandy, the Duponts grow apples for the production of cider; Calvados – brandy distilled from cider, and barrel aged for many years, like Cognac; and Pommeau – the traditional aperitif of Normandy, made by blending aged Calvados with unfermented apple juice. The Duponts grow some forty different varieties of apples in their 27 hectares (about 67 acres) of orchards, most of which are farmed organically (all the apples for this cider were organic). To make a balanced and complex cider, a wide variety of apples are needed. Some are used for their sweetness (such as the Rouge Duret), some for their acids (Rambault), but most are some shade of bittersweet (Argile rouge, Binet rouge, Saint Martin, Mettais and Frequin are the most important). The soils of the Calvados region are full of clay and marl, and quite poor in nutrition, which leads to very small apples, with a higher skin-to-pulp ratio. This is beneficial because, like wine grapes, most of the apple's flavor and all of its color are in the skin and just beneath it.

All of the apples at Domaine Dupont are harvested by hand to prevent bruising or any other damage to the fruit. The apples are then stored in open wooden boxes called *padox* for a period of three to four weeks to ripen. During this time, starches in the fruit are converted into sugar, and natural enzymes in the fruit begin to break down the cell structure, softening the fruit. Next, the apples are shredded, and allowed to macerate for a few hours, extracting tannin, color and flavor from the skins. This must is then pressed, slowly but very firmly, and the juice goes into pre-fermentation tanks. Here, enzymes in the fruit will begin to work on the juice, and after a few more hours, a brown cap of foam will form on the top. This foam contains many of the fruit solids and other impurities that the cider maker doesn't want in the cider, so the clarified juice beneath the cap is decanted off into the actual fermenting tanks. The fermentation is carried out by the natural yeasts that come into the cidery on the fruit, and is allowed to happen slowly, without any intervention. When the residual sugar in the fermenting juice reached a level of approximately 30 grams per liter, the cider is bottled in Champagne-style bottles with corks and baskets, and fermentation is allowed to finish in the bottle. This leads to the natural carbonation, as well as a slight haziness from the spent yeast cells. The bottled cider is then aged at the Domaine for at least one year prior to release, to develop further flavor and complexity. A well made cider can be aged for as long as ten years further. The fizziness will slowly subside, but flavor development will continue for many years. To get the most enjoyment out of your cider, drink it from a small-mouthed white wine or beer glass, or even better yet, a Champagne flute. The cider will best show its full range of flavors if you drink it slightly chilled, about 45-50°F.

The Dupont Organic Cider pours into its glass with a cloudy bronze-orange color. While cider doesn't have the requisite proteins that lead to head retention in beer, you will get a constant bead of very fine bubbles from the bottom of the glass, in the manner of Champagne. The aromas are bright and tangy – you can almost smell the tartness of the apples – and slightly rustic, with a hint of barnyard, from the wild yeasts used in fermentation. The flavors are explosively appley, with tangy acidity, and hints of tannin from the apple skins. The finish is crisp, with very complex blend of apple flavors. Ciders like this one from Etienne Dupont do well with a variety of foods, from charcuterie and braised rabbit to light seafoods, but I find that a soft-ripened triple cream cheese like Brie or Camembert is a match made in heaven.