



PLUMPJACK

WINES

Beer of the Month Club

November 2004 Selections

Hen's Tooth

Morland Brewing, Bury St. Edmonds, Suffolk, England

6.5%abv \$3.50/50cl

Morland's was established as a farmhouse brewery in the town of Abingdon, Oxfordshire, in 1711. Abingdon had a long brewing history already, the local Benedictine monastery having been brewing ales since as early as 1100. One member of the Morland family, George Morland, became a rather famous landscape painter in the late 1700's, and his image, with brushes and palette, is still the firm's trademark some 200 years later. In 1929, the automotive company MG opened a factory in Abingdon, and the first car produced at the new plant featured a gold-flecked black body, which the locals referred to as the 'Old Speckled Hen' for its resemblance to the local farm fowl. In 1979, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the factory, Morland's created what was to become their best-known beer, the Old Speckled Hen. Unfortunately, this homage was lost on the executives at MG, who proceeded to close the Abingdon factory the very next year. Fortunately, that was not the end of the beer, which Morland's continued to brew, but only a bottled version, and it was meant to be sold only in their own pubs. In 1990 they introduced a new beer to the line, a stronger, bottle-conditioned version of the Hen, appropriately called the 'Hen's Tooth' in reference to the rarity of the beer (from the old English saying "Rare as a Hen's Tooth"). In recent years, Morland's was purchased by brewing giant Greene King. The brewing operations have been consolidated at the GK brewery in Bury St Edmonds, Suffolk, but the recipe remains the same, including Morland's proprietary yeast strain, which accounts for the distinctive flavors of the Old Speckled Hen and the Hen's Tooth. Only the water source has changed.

The Hen's Tooth Ale was Morland's answer to the resurgence in interest among Britons in strong, cask- or bottle-conditioned 'real' ales. By brewing to a higher strength, and finishing the fermentation in the bottle or cask, a brewer is able to make a beer with a longer drinking life, as well as a product that gains flavor intensity and complexity with time in the bottle/cask. The Hen's Tooth is brewed using pipkin pale and crystal malts, Challenger and Goldings hops, and Morland's proprietary yeast strain, which has been in use for at least 100 years. At the time of bottling, a small dosage of maltose syrup (basically a sugar syrup made from natural malt sugars) and yeast is added to facilitate the secondary fermentation. This process will (as I'm sure you are getting used to!) leave a light sediment in the bottle, which is harmless, but can be left behind by a gentle pour, if you prefer. The Hen's Tooth is best enjoyed in a traditional pint glass, or large mug, and should be served only slightly chilled to enjoy its full range of flavors.

The Hen's Tooth pours into the glass with a beautiful amber color, hinting at copper in the center, and with a rocky, slowly-diminishing head. Aromas of malt cake and roasted grains are backed up by hints of tart cherries and citrus fruits. On the palate, there is an initial burst of sweet, grainy malt, which is almost immediately followed by bittering hops and a distinct sour note that is a byproduct of Morland's yeast strain. As the beer comes up to room temperature, the flavors broaden and become more complex, with the bitterness of the finish becoming more of a long, intriguing accent rather than the abrupt sharpness it was when first poured. The finish is quite long, echoing the tart fruitiness noted earlier. The Hen's Tooth makes a great winter warmer all on its own, but it really shines with a wide variety of English (or American English-style) cheeses, especially sharper ones like a true Cheddar.

Smoked Porter 2004

Alaskan Brewing Company, Juneau, Alaska

6.5%abv \$5.00/22oz

Gold was discovered in the panhandle of Alaska in 1881, and the small town of Juneau was founded very shortly thereafter. Almost immediately, the local population exploded with incoming treasure hunters, and by the turn of the 20th century Juneau had at least four breweries. Like most gold rushes, this one did not last very long, and by the early 1900's the loss of population combined with Americas impending experiment in Prohibition led to the extinction of Alaskan brewing. In 1986, at the very beginning of the modern microbrewing era in the US, Geoff and Marcy Larson founded the Chinook Alaskan Brewing Company in Juneau, Alaska's first brewery in nearly 100 years. Their first product, Chinook Alaskan Amber Ale, was fashioned after a gold rush era recipe that they were able to track down with a local historian. Within a year or so, the 'Chinook' was dropped from the name of the company, due to confusion with many other products using that moniker, not to mention the variety of hops that shares the name. In 1988 Alaskan introduced their Smoked Porter, the first smoked beer to be produced in the US in modern times. The Smoked Porter proved to be such a success, that it is now a holiday tradition at the brewery, and it is brewed at the start of each winter as a vintage-dated holiday ale.

The Smoked Porter is loosely based on the German *Rauchbier*, or smoked beer, from the region around Bamberg, but it is a decidedly heavier and darker brew than the German version. The process begins by taking the four malts (Crystal, Munich, chocolate, and black) to the salmon smokery across the street from the brewery, where they are smoked over burning alder wood. These are then brewed with Chinook and Willamette hops, yeast, and glacier water. Upon bottling, a small dosage is added to ensure stability and age-worthiness, and the resulting beer can be enjoyed for many years after its vintage. Vertical tastings of older vintages show that the smokiness mellows and becomes more integrated with the beer over time, allowing the sweeter, more chocolaty malt notes to shine through. Since its inception in 1988, the Alaskan Smoked Porter has become the most award winning beer in the history of the Great American Beer Festival, with fifteen total medals. Your Smoked Porter can be enjoyed at just about any temperature from ice cold to room temp, depending on your mood and local weather. Served warm in a large pint glass, this will really leave you feeling warm and smoky!

The Smoked Porter pours a deep, almost black, brown color, with a lacy, cappuccino-colored head. The nose shows a wonderful, delicate smokiness, with almost a hint of smoked salmon, although that could be subliminal, based on where the smoking is done. Hints of toasted bread and campfire lead into an explosive palate of spice cake, chocolate, smoke and brine. The 'seaside' qualities continue all the way through the tasting experience, resulting in a real sense of place; one could almost imagine sitting on a beach in Alaska, sipping beer and downing oysters. The rich body of this beer carries the flavors a long way, resulting in one of the most profound finishes I can remember. While the Smoked Porter is an obvious choice for smoked seafoods, it will also pair very nicely with raw oysters and game meats such as venison or caribou (as per the label!), or strong blue cheeses.