



**PLUMPJACK**

WINES

## **Beer of the Month Club**

**September 2004 Selections**

### **Coopers Sparkling Ale**

**Coopers Brewery Ltd., Regency Park, Adelaide, South Australia**

**5.8%abv      \$8.50/6x12.7oz.**

Using an old family recipe, Thomas Cooper began brewing in 1862, in a search for some tonic to ease his ailing wife. When his neighbors in the fledgling state of South Australia got a chance to try his 'medicine', they encouraged Cooper to sell them some of his home brew. As word spread, and demand increased, Cooper decided to dedicate himself full-time to the art of brewing. In 1861, he built his commercial brewery in the Adelaide suburb of Leabrook. The brewery was eventually passed on to his sons, who continued to evolve and expand the business, consistently winning awards throughout Australia and the rest of the world. Through two world wars and the Great Depression of the 1930's, Cooper's Brewery was the benchmark for brewing in South Australia, and the rest of the continent. As of 2001, Coopers has moved to a new, larger brewery in the suburb of Regebts' Park. Now in its fifth generation of family ownership, Coopers is the last family owned and operated brewery in Australia.

Adelaide Sparkling Ale is actually a separate category of ale, in the same way that a stout is its own type of ale. This statement used to be much easier to back up with evidence, but today Coopers remains as the last brewer of this traditional Aussie style beer. While the folks at Coopers are decidedly secretive about their brewing process (indeed, most of the facts that I am giving to you here are crimped together using small bits of information dug up in various locations – the Coopers people wouldn't divulge any of the proprietary information regarding their products!), there are certain key steps to brewing this type of ale. The brewing process begins as any other, with a boiling mash of Australian pale and crystal malts, as well as domestically grown hops for bittering. When tasting the Sparkling Ale, you may find some flavors reminiscent of the great wheat beers of Europe, but I am assured by several sources that the beer is 100% barley malt, so those flavors must be a product of the proprietary yeast strain used by the brewery. After an initial top-fermentation, the ale is dry-hopped for aromatics, then lagered (cold-aged) in tank for a short period. When bottling time comes, each bottle is given a small dosage of active yeast culture and fermentable sugar (presumably malt sugar, although 'candi' sugar may be used, as in Belgium), to enable a secondary bottle fermentation. A prolonged bottle-conditioning follows, to allow for the completion of the fermentation process, as well as to allow the beer to mellow a bit. The finished product will have a slight haze of dead yeast cells in the bottom of the bottle, but you will not want to discard this, as it forms an integral part of the flavor profile. Coopers Sparkling Ale also ages quite well, and will develop further nuance with as much as 18 months of additional age. Try rolling the bottle on its side GENTLY just before opening. This will allow the beer to pour in its intended cloudy style, and will greatly improve the complexity of the flavor profile. Start with your Sparkling Ale well-chilled, but pay special attention to the way the flavor profile broadens and changes as the beer comes up in temperature. It is best served in a tall, fluted, pilsner-style glass, but a pint glass will do in a pinch.

Coopers Sparkling Ale pours into the glass with a beautiful, cloudy apricot color, and a lacy white head. Initial whiffs reveal a depth of fruit aromas, including citrus, and such tropical fruits as mango, banana, and passionfruit, with just a hint of hop flowers. On the palate, it is bright and lively (sparkling, even!), with more fruit flavors and a hint of bubblegum, somewhat like a German Weisse beer. The hops add just enough of a balance to keep the fruitiness of the beer from becoming cloying, giving just a hint of citrusy tang on the finish. While Coopers Sparkling Ale will pair nicely with 'shrimp on the barbie' and other seafood dishes, try it with something more exotically Aussie, like grilled emu steaks with chutney.

## **Duchesse de Bourgogne**

**Brouwerij Verhaeghe-Vichte, Vichte, Belgium**

**6.2%abv      \$3.75/330ml**

The Verhaeghe family founded their brewery in 1875, on the grounds of the family farm/castle at the village of Vichte. At the time, artisan brewing was all the rage in Belgium, and small, farmhouse breweries were the rule, rather than the exception. By the time of the First World War, Verhaeghe was one of the largest and most successful of its type, but that changed with the German occupation, when most of the brewery was dismantled and stolen to be sold as scrap by the Germans after Paul Verhaeghe refused to brew beer for the occupying forces. After the Great War, the Verhaeghe family rebuilt their brewery, updating and modernizing the equipment at the same time, and they were brewing again by the early twenties. In 1923, they won their first international trophy for one of their beers, and their destiny as brewers was truly cemented. When the Germans re-occupied Belgium during WWII, the brewery stayed open and brewed for both the occupiers and the local populace, but they were restricted to brewing a 'table beer' of only 0.8% alcohol, due to shortages of barley. But, at least this allowed them to keep the brewery intact, and in a position to recover following the war. Following WWII, pilsner beers became the 'in' style, and although the Verhaeghes did bend to the popular style, producing a range of lager beers, they also maintained their small craft-brewing style, and were thus prepared to capitalize on the more recent trend toward small, artisan ales.

The Duchesse de Bourgogne is named for the much beloved Duchesse Mary, born in the Flemish town of Bruges. At the tender age of six years, Mary was married to the five year old Maximilian, Duc de Bourgogne (the Duke of Burgundy), in an attempt by their families to strengthen their independence from the newly unified and very powerful Kingdom of France, which bordered both Burgundy and Flanders. Mary would prove to have much influence over her young (-er?) husband, and by the time of her untimely death at the age of twenty five in a horseback riding accident, she was much revered and loved both by the people of her homeland of Flanders, as well as the substantial population of Burgundy. The artwork on the label of Duchesse de Bourgogne is a famous portrait of Mary by the artist Hugo Maertens.

The Duchesse is a classic example of the Flemish Brown Ale, a style distinct both in its brewing and aging techniques, as well as the flavor of the finished product. Beginning with a selection of medium-dark malts, and just enough hops to add some aromatic complexity, the brew is first fermented using traditional, top-fermenting ale yeast. After brewing, the ale is aged for long periods in huge, old, oak casks, more reminiscent of those used in the wineries of old-world countries than of any other beer style. At this point, several different beers are made from the same raw material, but the Duchesse is special in its treatment. After an aging period of at least 18 months, the main portion of the beer is considered ripe, and it is then blended with a beer of the same recipe, but that has been aged for only eight months. This process will add to the liveliness of the finished product, while allowing the amazing sweet/sour flavors that can only develop with extended aging to still shine through. Unlike most Belgian ales, the Duchesse does not receive any dosage, and is not re-fermented in the bottle. Serve the Duchesse at cool cellar temperature (about 48-52°F), or allow it to sit at room temp for a few minutes if it comes out of the cooler. Traditionally, the brown ales of West Flanders are consumed in a large red wine glass, similar to those used for red Burgundy wine – this is truly the red Burgundy of beers!

The Duchesse de Bourgogne has a rich mahogany color with reddish highlights, and pours with a very thick texture and next to no foam. In the nose, there is a sense of sweet red fruits and spice cake, with an underlying barrel note that is reminiscent of fresh strawberries marinated in balsamico. On the palate, the Duchesse has amazing body, feeling almost thick on the tongue. There is an initial sweetness, once again reminding me of a Christmas fruit cake, with roasted grains, sweet red fruits, and a hint of soy. Then, the tangy finish – a by-product of the long barrel aging - brings it all together with a crisp, satisfying finale that echoes the sweet-tart nature of the beer. Try the Duchesse as an after-dinner beer with strong cheeses and coarse bread, or with desserts such as spice cake or a strawberry tart.