



September 2008

Black Wattle Superior Ale

Baron's Brewing Pty. Ltd., Sydney, New South Wales, Australia

5.8%abv \$2.00/11.2oz

Scott Garnett and Richard Adamson were dorm-mates at University when they began pursuing their loves of great beer, eventually turning the lounge area in their shared dorm room into a makeshift brewery to supply themselves and their friends. Almost immediately the two began searching the world over for the very best hops and malts to brew with, an obsession with perfection that has served them well in their careers. By the end of their stays at university, the two had mastered five beer recipes, and their weekend Bacchanals had become legendary, sometimes attracting as many as 300 revelers. After college, the two diverged, each following their chosen career path, but both continued to home brew, as well. Some fifteen years later, after each had enjoyed a certain level of professional success, the numbers finally aligned, and with the help of several friends/investors, they were ready to take their life-long passion for brewing professional. The call went out to their friends and associates: "We're going to be Beer Barons!", and the company was officially launched. Unlike most amateur brewers that go pro, "Boss Baron" Scott and "Brewing Baron" Richard anticipated from the beginning that economy of scale was the only way to go in a country dominated by a single, huge brewer, so they aimed high. Their first beers were launched just three years ago, but with their perfectionist attitudes and drive to succeed, they have already become Australia's leading independent brewer, and in the past year alone have signed over A\$60 million in export contracts for the US and Russia, and continue to expand.

Australia has not been a big market for ales in several decades, and the entire industry was dominated by Carleton United Brewers (now a subsidiary of SAB/Miller), one of the world's biggest lager brewers. So, when Barons began brewing, they started small and smart, with a classic Australian-style lager beer. Very soon thereafter a Pale Ale and an Extra Special Bitter were added to the line up, and the Barons were surprised at how well their countrymen took to these bigger, more assertive styled ales, but the results were immediate, and the brewery truly took off as an Australian institution. Then, early this year, the Barons launched their "Native Series"; two new beers brewed using ingredients indigenous to Australia's "bush tucker", or Aboriginal diet. First was their Lemon Myrtle Wheat, kind of the Oz take on the spiced wheat beers of Belgium, and now the Black Wattle Superior. The Black Wattle Superior starts its life as a classic pale ale, using Australian pale ale, wheat and roasted Munich malts. Along with these malts, black wattle seed goes in to the boil. Black wattle comes from any one of a hundred or more sub-species of acacia tree that grow throughout the Outback of Australia, and are regularly used in Aboriginal cooking, especially in bread. When roasted in a similar fashion to coffee beans, they have a very nutty, almost chocolaty flavor that modern Australian pastry chefs had been utilizing for some time. This is the first commercial beer brewed using black wattle. The beer is very lightly hopped to keep the focus on the wattle seed, but the hops include Fuggles and Goldings grown in Australia. Filtered well water is used in the brewing process, along with a classic English top-fermenting ale yeast that gives the beer its characteristic silky texture. The beer is lightly filtered before bottling, and should be consumed fairly fresh, say within six months or so of bottling. I found the wattle seed flavors to show best at medium-cold temperatures, say 45-50°F, and from a wide-mouthed pint glass or ale chalice.

The Black Wattle Ale pours into the glass a rich, caramel color with hints of red at the center. The head is off-white and creamy, but dissipates fairly quickly, leaving very little lace in the glass. The aromas are very malt-focused, with hints of caramel, roasted nuts and cocoa. This beer has a very round, creamy feel in the mouth, and very soft carbonation. The bread-like malty flavors make themselves noticed first, followed by hints of chocolate and roasted nuts. The finish is likewise creamy and nutty, with the hints of cocoa trailing off in the end. This would make a great match for a simple ploughman's lunch of bread, cheese and assorted pickles, but I think it would also make a nice dessert beer, especially when paired with something not too sweet, like a chocolate hazelnut torte.



Coney Island Freaktoberfest

Schmaltz Brewing Company, Saratoga Springs, New York

6.66%abv \$5.00/22oz

Jeremy Cowan began his brewing career with little more than an idea, and plenty of chutzpa (that's audacity to you and me!). When he decided to launch He'Brew, America's first kosher microbrews, he had no brewing experience and no business experience, but he thought he did have a captive audience. Starting in 1996, Jeremy had 100 cases of beer made to his specifications at Anderson Valley Brewing Co., in Mendocino County. As he hit the road in his mom's Volvo station wagon to sell his beer, he found that his most valuable asset as a salesman was shtick (a gimmick for attracting attention). Over the years, Jeremy developed his shtick to masterful levels, building his production slowly and through word-of-mouth (mostly his own!) to more than 35,000 cases per year. Along the way, he outgrew the facilities at Anderson Valley, and found new help in the form of the Olde Saratoga Brewing Co. (owned by California's Mendocino Brewing Co.), in Saratoga Springs, New York, where the beers are brewed to this day. Earlier this year, Jeremy launched his new line of beers: the Coney Island Lagers. These (non-kosher) lagers are also brewed at Mendocino's facility in upstate New York, but they are, in fact, bottom-fermented lagers, unlike the ales brewed under the He'Brew label. A percentage of the proceeds from the sales of the Coney Island beers will benefit Coney Island USA, an arts non-profit whose mission is to defend the honor of lost forms of American popular arts and culture in Brooklyn's Coney Island neighborhood. Jeremy commissioned Brooklyn-based tattoo artist Dave Wallin to create the label art for the beers, which represent some of those lost arts: there's the Sword Swallower, a "Steel Hop" lager; and the Albino Python, a spiced wheat lager; and, now, Freaktoberfest, a "Blood Red Lager" to honor the sideshow freak in us all – as well as serve as the Oktoberfest and Halloween seasonal in the range of beers.

The Freaktoberfest is loosely based on the classic Vienna-style Märzens that are traditionally served at Oktoberfest celebrations throughout Bavaria and the rest of central Europe. I say loosely because, while the beer is made using traditional malts and hops for the style, the finished beer is, indeed, a freak of nature. It is brewed using Canadian Pale and wheat malts, German Munich and Vienna malts, and British caramel malt. This combination of malts gives plenty of fermentable sugars, and ample color to create a nice, rich amber lager. But, this isn't an amber lager, as will be apparent the second you pour it from the bottle. I have fired off emails to Jeremy himself – and a couple of others in the company – but have not yet received any response as to exactly where that alarming color comes from. If I receive an answer after this month's beers ship out, I'll be sure to include an explanation in next month's notes! The hop bill includes the very traditional – Hallertau and Northern Brewer – as well as some American upstarts to provide a bit more of the hop character that American drinkers seem to demand these days: Cascade, Willamette, and Warrior hops. New York spring water and a traditional bottom-fermenting lager yeast are the other ingredients. Like most lagers, the Freaktoberfest should be consumed fresh, and is best served chilled, but if you get it too cold, you will lose some of the complexity of the beer. Try it around 40°F, from a classic pint or tall lager glass.

Your Freaktoberfest will pour into the glass with an alarming blood red color, and a fizzy pink head that dissipates quickly, leaving a slight lace in the glass. The nose is fairly subtle, with hints of sweet malt, a slight citrusy-herbal note from the hops, and maybe a hint of red berries – although this might be an optical/olfactory illusion caused by the unusual color. On the palate, it is rich and malt-forward, not too different from a traditional Oktoberfest Märzen, if perhaps a bit hoppier. There is a slight fruitiness to the flavor profile, too, but once again, it seems to be malt-driven fruit flavors, and not some byproduct of the coloring. The hops never really assert themselves as a dominant part of the flavor profile, but provide a nice, earthy balance to the finish. What to pair this with? Blood sausage? Liver and onions? Why not keep it simple and go for traditional Oktoberfest fare: brats and kraut, or any old hunk of pork with ample amounts of spicy mustard should fit the bill nicely.