

17A. British Strong Ale: Burton Ale

June 14, 2018

Overall Impression

A rich, malty, sweet, and bitter dark ale of moderately strong alcohol. Full bodied and chewy with a balanced hoppy finish and complex malty and hoppy aroma. Fruity notes accentuate the malt richness, while the hops help balance the sweeter finish.

Aroma

Moderately strong, rich, and sweet malty aroma with deep toast or dark caramel notes. No roasty or burnt malt apparent, but a bready and biscuity base is common. Dark or dried fruit (plums, figs, prunes, raisins) often present at up to a moderate level. A light alcohol presence may be noted, but should not be sharp. Hops can be light to moderate, and reflective of fruity, floral, woody, or spicy English varieties. The malt makes the strongest impression in the balance, but the other aspects add an aromatic complexity.

Appearance

Light copper to dark brown in color. Darker versions can be nearly opaque, but clarity should be good when noted. Moderate-sized, fine-textured, cream-colored head, persistent.

Flavor

Similar to the aroma, the malt is initially noted with a rich character and a somewhat sweet finish. The bitterness level is medium-high to high and helps balance the strong malt flavor. The malt flavors have a bready and biscuity character with substantial deep toast or dark caramel flavors; overly roasted and burnt flavors are inappropriate. Hop flavor can be medium to low, with a fruity, floral, spicy, or woody English quality. Dark or dried fruit flavors (plum, prune, fig, or raisin) are often present at up to a moderate level. A light alcohol flavor might be detected, but the sweetness in the finish usually masks it. The sweetness should be balanced by hops and never be cloying or clashing.

Mouthfeel

Medium-full to full body with a smooth, rich, luscious character. Warming alcohol should be noticeable in stronger versions. Moderate carbonation, lower when served on hand pump.

Comments

The beer has a long and storied history and many versions existed over time. The style represented here mostly represents the beer at its peak before WWI, although the parameters allow for later era lower-gravity versions as well. A keeping ale, the beer was typically aged before consuming.

History

Popular in Burton before IPAs were invented, widely exported to the Baltic countries. After 1822, reformulated to be less sweet and strong. Most popular in the Victorian Era, with several different strengths available in the family. The strongest versions evolved into English Barleywines. Became

less popular after WWII, eventually dying out around 1970. Some versions exist as Winter Warmers, Barleywines, or Old Ales, but the name has lost favor in the market.

Characteristic Ingredients

Bready and biscuity English base malts. Substantial portion of 'high kilned' malt. Historical versions often used brewing sugars and corn. More modern versions can use crystal malts for flavor and chocolate malt for color. English ale yeast. Traditional English hops, often dry hopped.

Style Comparison

Has some similarity in malt flavor to Wee Heavy, but with substantially more bitterness. Less strong than an English Barleywine.

Vital Statistics

IBU	40 – 50
SR M	14 – 22
OG	1.055 – 1.075
FG	1.018 – 1.024
AB V	5.0% – 7.5%

Commercial Examples

The Laboratory Gone for a Burton

Style Attributes

high-strength, traditional-style, balanced, strong-ale-family, british-isles, ~~brown-color~~, top-fermented

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