

Ideas for women and cask beer

- By Martin Dinkele
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I went to the East Anglian Beer Festival in Bury St Edmunds last weekend. It was well run and well attended. So much so that when I was there on the third day of four many of the beers were already sold out.

What most surprised me though was the high proportion of women at the event. I would estimate 25-30% of people there were women. Of all ages, some with males partners, others in mixed sex and all women groups. All happily drinking cask ale.

The women also seemed to have a civilising effect on the atmosphere at the event — there was less bad language and boorish behaviour. Football clubs who encourage women to attend have noticed the same effect on crowd behaviour too I think.

It made me think what the brewers might do to attract even more women into cask ale. Figures quoted by the Bittersweet Partnership, a body set up by Coors to try to attract women into beer, show that only 13% of drinkers are women.

Here is six ideas I had to attract women into cask ale:

More elegant glassware:

Much cask ale glassware seems very masculine and old fashioned – characteristics likely to put off many women wandering what to drink. Any cask ale brand serious about attracting women might look at lager brands like Peroni and Stella Artois for steers about glass design with female appeal.

More half pints:

In my experience many brewers consider half pint glasses as a bit of an afterthought. Both in terms of design and the numbers they send to bars. Elegant half pint glasses with subtle branding — again look at Peroni for design clues here – will make women feel far more comfortable than they do at the moment.

Don't be patronising

Don't brew "light fruity easy to drink" beers under the mistaken (male-centric) view that women like that sort of thing. They don't. Any women (or man) who wants a sweet or fruity or coloured drink will have a cider or an alcopop or spirits or a soft drink.

Names and pump clips:

The names and visual identity of many well-known ales are masculine – Spitfire, Abbot, John Smith’s, Bombardier for example. Nothing wrong with, these brands are some of the most successful in the category. But some more unisex names for seasonal ales and new brands may help broaden the appeal of these brands. In the same vein, pump clips and can designs that come over as a little less sergeant major and a provide direction on flavour would be welcomed.

Navigating the category:

The beer sector does not help itself with its terminology and reliance on ABV to differentiate between brands. Men and women are confused and I think you need to be a true CAMRA loyalist to understand Cyclops. New World wine makes it easy for consumers by using grape varieties to describe wine. Cheese uses a scale that runs from mild to mature. Instead of terms like “session”, “premium”, “mild”, “bitter”, “keg” and suchlike I would propose a system where beers are differentiated by colour – from dark (like Guinness) to light (like Hoegaarden) via relevant colours like golden (like Fullers Discovery) and brown (like Old Speckled Hen) and amber (like Foster’s). Such a scheme also naturally lends itself to matching beer with food. It also encompasses lager and stout.

Health:

Many women think beer might give them a “beer gut”. In fact the opposite is true. Beer has only 102 calories per 250ml compared with 192 for wine. Furthermore cask beer has no fat or cholesterol. These “facts” might be worth communicating more widely along with some visuals of elegant glassware and well known female beer drinkers like Madonna who told the world that Timothy Taylor Landlord was her favourite beer.

Just some thoughts. In combination, the above ideas may well boost the category and make money for the first brewer brave enough to embrace them.

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