

CAMRA's Beer Styles



Campaign
for
Real Ale



A guide to the Champion Beer of
Britain Beer Style Categories

● CAMRA's Beer Styles

Beer is the world's third favourite drink. The most popular beer style is lager but beer is much more than this. Most beer drinkers might have an idea what a traditional bitter is, however, do you know how this differs from a Pale Ale or Golden Ale? And what exactly is a Barley Wine?

The situation is made more complex by the growth in the number of brewers brewing international recipes, experimenting with new beer styles and digging up very old ones as well. This leaflet will help cut through some of the jargon and is designed to show you the 12 beer style categories, which CAMRA uses for judging its prestigious Champion Beer of Britain Awards.



Champion Beer of Britain

Even if you aren't a regular real ale drinker, the likelihood is that you will have heard of the Champion Beer of Britain. This iconic beer competition is run annually by the Campaign for Real Ale to find the best real ales in the UK.

The beers are chosen for the competition through a national vote by CAMRA members and by the recommendations of CAMRA's Tasting Panels, which are based around the country. The results are compiled and the best scoring beers are put forward to be judged in categories (detailed in this leaflet). This is done firstly at a regional level with the winners in each style going forward to a national judging.

Thus, to win CAMRA's Champion Beer of Britain requires not only a great tasting beer that a beer drinker would want to try again and again but one that has been consistently good over a period of two years. A tall order, meaning that the winner really is the best of the best!

Ingredients and flavours

There are four basic ingredients in beer: water, yeast, malt and hops. Like a good chef, brewers will decide which ingredients to use to get the end result they desire.

If the brewers want a strong beer, they will use a high level of malt, as it is the malt that provides the food for the yeast, which then produces the alcohol. Malt also gives the beer its sweetness and body as well most of its colour. Malt is barley that has been germinated and then heated. A beer's colour can range from very pale yellow to black, according to how long the barley is heated for, and at what temperature. The malt gives caramel, biscuity and roast notes, including chocolate and coffee. Black malt can also give a burnt bitterness.

But hops are usually the main source of a beer's bitterness. There is a huge range of hops and you will come across British beers using hops from Europe, the New World and even Japan as well as Britain.

Hops contribute to fruit notes; citrus, peach and tropical are not unusual. They can also give floral and peppery notes.

In stronger beers, the combination of the ingredients tends to give very complex flavours including caramelised fruit and you may also pick up the warming impact of the alcohol.

The other two ingredients, water and yeast will also have an impact on flavour. For example, some beers, such as Pilsner, require soft water whereas Porters do better with water high in calcium carbonates such as in London. Conversely, if a brewer is trying to showcase the hops in a beer, they will choose a yeast, such as an American strain. This can have a more neutral taste compared to the type of British yeast that would be used in a traditional Bitter, where the yeast gives a fruity edge.

Finding out more

CAMRA runs a number of tutored tasting and training sessions on beer around the country, most of which are open to members and non members. Many of these take place at CAMRA's beer festivals including the Great British Beer Festival.

CAMRA members also have the opportunity to be trained to join one of its many Tasting Panels, which provide beer descriptions for CAMRA's *Good Beer Guide* and put beers forward for the Champion Beer of Britain.

For more information on CAMRA and its activities, visit:

www.camra.org.uk



Contents	Page
1. Milds: up to and including 4% ABV.....	4
2. Session Bitters: up to and including 4.3% ABV	4
3. Premium Bitters: 4.4% - 6.4% ABV	5
4. Session Pale, Blond and Golden Ales: up to and including 4.3% ABV	5
5. Premium Pale, Blond and Golden Ales: 4.4% - 6.4% ABV	6
6. British & New World IPAs: 5.5% and above.....	6
7. Brown and Red Ales, Old Ales and Strong Milds: Up to 6.4%	7
8. Session Stouts and Porters: up to and including 4.9% ABV	7
9. Strong Stouts and Porters including Imperial Stouts and Baltic Porters: 5.0% ABV and above	8
10. Barley Wines and Strong Ales: 6.5% and above.....	9
11. Speciality Beers – Differently produced	10
12. Speciality Beers – Flavoured	12

● Champion Beer of Britain Beer Style Categories

1. Milds: up to and including 4% ABV

'Mild' used to mean fresh and reflected the fact that the beer was not aged. Although an old style of beer, Mild is not widely available in many parts of the country but May is a good time to find it as some pubs participate in CAMRA's Make Mine Mild campaign. These beers are light drinking and not very hoppy.

Colour

There are two types of mild: light or pale Milds and dark Milds and so the colour can be dark brown to black to pale amber or even gold. In addition, Scottish 60 Shillings or Scottish Light Beer fits into this category. Usually, they are dark brown to black in colour.

Pale Milds

These beers differ from Bitters and Pale Ales in that they are lightly hopped and may have a light fruit character. They are malty and the beer may be sweet with a little butterscotch/toffee (diacetyl).

Dark Milds

Dark Milds are frequently sweet with a light bitterness. The dominant flavour is of malt and roasted notes of chocolate, coffee and liquorice are often noticeable. Caramel and butterscotch/toffee (diacetyl) may also be present.

Scottish 60 Shillings or Scottish Light

The dominant flavour should be malt and butterscotch/toffee (diacetyl) may also be present. As with the other Milds, they are lightly hopped.

2. Session Bitters: up to and including 4.3% ABV

These are 'traditional' Bitters with a thin to average body. They are often called Bitters and Best Bitters.

Colour

Usually, amber to dark brown.

Flavour

These beers should have a malt character with noticeable hops; typically earthy, spicy and peppery but may also be floral or piney. Fruit may also be present, sometimes of citrus but must not dominate the taste. Bitterness may range from light to strong. A little butterscotch or toffee (diacetyl) may be present but should be minimal.





3. Premium Bitters: 4.4% - 6.4% ABV

'Traditional' stronger Bitters with an average to thick body.

Colour

Usually, amber to dark brown.

Flavour

Medium to strong malt flavour with noticeable hops; typically earthy, spicy and peppery but may also be floral, piney or citrus. Fruit may be medium to strong but should not dominate. Stronger Bitters may have estery notes such

as pear drops and the bitterness may range from medium to strong. A little butterscotch or toffee (diacetyl) may be present but should be minimal.



4. Session Pale, Blond and Golden Ales: up to and including 4.3% ABV

These are refreshing, light drinking beers.

Pale Ales incorporating British and New World Pale Ales

Colour

Dark gold to amber.

Flavour

Malt should be present but must be light in character. Hop flavours must also be noticeable and may vary from traditional earthy or spicy English and German hops to citrusy and tropical New World hops. Fruitier than a Session Bitter. Minimal or no butterscotch (diacetyl).

Blonds incorporating British and New World Golden Ales

Colour

Straw to gold in colour.

Flavour

Minimal malt flavour with the fruit being medium to strong. The hop may vary from traditional earthy or spicy English and German hops to the citrusy New World hops. Minimal or no butterscotch (diacetyl).

Golden Ales will have pronounced fruity, citrus hop notes and may have a strong bitterness. **Blonds** will have minimal to moderate fruit but not a strong citrus character

5. Premium Pale, Blond and Golden Ales:

4.4% - 6.4% ABV

These beers are refreshing but fuller bodied than the Session varieties.

Pale Ales incorporating British and New World Pale Ales

Colour

Dark gold to amber.

Flavour

Malt should be present but must be light to medium in character and should not dominate the flavour; fruit may be minimal to strong and citrusy or tropical. Hop flavours are noticeable but may vary from traditional earthy and spicy English and German hops to citrusy New World hops. Minimal or no butterscotch (diacetyl). Medium to full-bodied. Fruitier than a Premium Bitter. Minimal or no butterscotch (diacetyl).

Blonds incorporating British and New World Golden Ales

Colour

Straw to gold.

Flavour

Minimal or no malt should be present. Hop flavours are noticeable and may vary from traditional earthy and spicy English and German hops to citrusy New World hops. Minimal or no butterscotch (diacetyl).

Golden Ales will have pronounced fruity, citrus hop notes and may have a strong bitterness. **Blonds** will have minimal to moderate fruit but not a strong citrus character.

6. British & New World IPAs: 5.5% and above

IPA stands for India Pale Ale. It was the Midland town of Burton on Trent that became famous for this style of beer, exporting it around the world including to India, hence the name. These are strong hoppy beers with moderate to strong bitterness; usually bittersweet. The finish is long and complex.

British IPAs

Colour

Amber to pale brown.

Flavour

These beers are hoppier than Premium Bitters. The benchmark is a Bass recipe from the 19th century comprised of pale malt, brewing sugar and East Kent Goldings and Progress hops. More modern hop varieties can be used but they should be English in style rather than New World.

There is often honeyed/biscuit malt aroma and flavours with pepper, spicy, earthy, piney or floral resins from the hops. Fruit, if evident, should not be the overwhelming citrus kick of New World IPAs.

New World IPAs

Colour

Straw to pale brown.

Flavour

These IPAs are 'hop forward' but with a balance of malt, hops and fruit. They are more complex than Premium Pale Ales and Blonds and can have fruit levels akin to New World Golden Ales being noticeably fruitier than British IPAs. The fruit can be citrusy, tropical or of white wine. Floral notes are not unknown. The malt makes less of an impact than with traditional British versions being light and usually biscuity, although New England IPAs (NEIPAs) tend to have a greater malt balance than the more assertively hoppy West Coast versions.

Black IPAs

Colour

Typically dark brown or black.

Flavour

The roast character should be zero to light, complementing rather than dominating the hops and fruit in the flavour. Typically, little residual sweetness.

Weaker 'black IPAs' sit within either the Session or Premium Pale, Blond and Golden Ale categories.



7. Brown and Red Ales, Old Ales and Strong Milds: Up to 6.4%

These are darker beers with malty notes.

Colour

Light brown to black.

Brown Ales

Malt is to the fore sometimes with roast and/or some smokiness and nut-like flavours. There may be some hop character and a light to moderate bitter or dry finish. Fruity flavours such as raisins or sultanas may be present. Occasionally, sweeter variants can be found where more caramel and chocolate notes are evident.

American Brown Ales

As Brown Ales but overlaid with fruity hops, sometimes intense, which may

lead to pronounced bittering. Fruit may often be citrus and/or tropical.

Red Ales

As with Brown Ales and American Brown Ales, malt is to the fore, often with roast and nutty flavours. Rye may be present, creating a tartness, but should be balanced and not dominate. American Red Ales are fruitier and hoppier.

Strong Milds and Unaged Old Ales

They have a light to rich malt character, sometimes with caramel and fruit such as raisins and sultanas. Lightly hopped. Old Ales tend to be more estery.

8. Session Stouts and Porters: up to and including 4.9% ABV

Porters were developed in London in the eighteenth century and named after the London Porters who worked on the docks and the City of London. It is thought to be the first global beer as, at one time, it was exported around the world. There is often confusion between stouts and porters. Once, Stout simply meant 'Strong'. CAMRA distinguishes between the two styles by describing Stouts as typically black and less hopped than Porters.

Stouts

Colour

Black.

Flavour

Stouts have flavours and aromas resulting from the roasted grain malts e.g. chocolate, caramel and coffee notes. They have minimal hop and fruit notes. There are a number of subsets in this category.

• Dry Stouts

Minimal sweetness and a dry astringency that may come from unmalted dark roasted barley.

• Oyster Stouts

These do not always contain oysters, being stouts to accompany oysters. Those that do may often have salty notes, either due to adding oyster shells (for subtle semi-sweet flavours) or adding whole oysters to create a unique ocean flavour and can be slightly bitter.

• Oatmeal Stouts

Oatmeal is added during the brewing process to create a stout with a full body and creamy notes, often sweet.

• Milk Stouts

Lactose (milk sugar) is added to create a smooth, sweet stout with a rounder mouthfeel, usually with subtle sweet, creamy notes and sometimes with vanilla and custard notes.

Porters

Colour

Usually, dark brown to black.

Flavour

Roasty notes of coffee or chocolate that are balanced by a hoppy character with some fruit. This may be dark fruits e.g. damsons, black cherries, or caramelised fruits, such as raisins or sultanas. Sweetness ranges from sweet to dry.

9. Strong Stouts and Porters including Imperial Stouts and Baltic Porters: 5.0% ABV and above

These are stronger versions of the Session varieties, usually with smoother, fuller mouthfeels.

Strong Stouts

Colour

Black.

Flavour

These beers have flavours and aromas resulting from the roasted malts e.g. chocolate, caramel and coffee notes. They should have a full mouthfeel with minimal hop and fruit notes. There are a number of subsets in this category.

• Strong Dry Stouts

Full mouthfeel with only a little sweetness and a dry astringency that may come from unmalted dark roasted barley.

• Strong Oyster Stouts

These do not always contain oysters, being stouts to accompany oysters. Those that do may often have salty notes either due to adding oyster shells (for subtle semi-sweet flavours) or adding whole oysters to create a unique ocean flavour and can be slightly bitter. Being stronger, these beers have a richness on the palate.

• Strong Oatmeal Stouts

Oatmeal is added during the brewing process to create a stout with a full body and creamy notes, often sweet.

• Strong Milk Stouts

Lactose (milk sugar) is added towards the end of brewing to create a smooth, sweet stout with a rounder mouthfeel, usually with subtle sweet, creamy notes and sometimes with vanilla and custard notes. Rich, full mouthfeel.

Strong Porters

Colour

Usually, dark brown to black.

Flavour

Roasty notes of coffee or chocolate that are balanced by a hoppy character with some fruit. This may be dark fruits e.g. damsons, black cherries or caramelised fruits, such as raisins or sultanas. Sweetness ranges from sweet to dry but with a rich, full body.

Imperial Stouts and Baltic Porters

This style of beer derives from the strong versions of stout and porter brewed in

London in the 18th and 19th centuries for export to Russia and the Baltic States.

Aromas and flavours are deep and complex with roasted grain, burnt fruit (raisins and sultanas), fresh leather, espresso coffee, bitter chocolate, molasses and liquorice. Hops may not be too much in evidence on the nose but may be peppery and spicy. The finish is long and complex, with bitter and spicy hops balancing creamy malt, roast, dark fruit, coffee, chocolate and liquorice. Warming alcohol is often noticeable due to the high alcohol content. These beers are full bodied, smooth and rich. If beers are aged in wood, there may be caramel and vanilla flavours.

There is considerable overlap between these two beer styles but Baltic Porters (sometimes called Imperial Porters) tend to be fruity e.g. blackcurrant, cherries and other dark fruits. They can also be paler in colour, dark reddish copper to brownish black.

10. Barley Wines and Strong Ales: 6.5% and above

Strong beer used to be produced to allow it to be kept, particularly to provide beer when it was too warm to brew. Many of the beers in this category are still aged before selling leading to wine-like notes. All of them are rich, complex, full bodied with noticeable alcohol but they may vary from dry to sweet, sometimes with honey notes. Bitterness may be medium to strong. The term Barley Wine probably dates from the late 1800's with Bass using it in the early 1900's.

Barley Wines

Colour

Usually, gold to tawny in colour.

Flavour

Estery and ripe fruit characteristics such as pear drops or strawberry may be present as well as sweet citrus marmalade flavours.

Strong Ales – Blond

Colour

Yellow to dark gold.

Flavour

Medium to strong malt character and some fruity notes may also be present.

Strong Ales – Dark

Colour

Brown to black.

Flavour

Roast notes of chocolate and coffee may be present as well as dark fruits and/or caramelised fruit.

Speciality

Speciality Beers are those made with non-conventional ingredients or techniques. Where the effect of this ingredient or technique dominates the appearance, aroma or flavour it becomes a Speciality. However, when the ingredient/technique merely complements the 'base beer' then it does not fit into the Speciality category. This is a large group of beers so CAMRA has split them into two: Differently Produced and Flavoured.

11.Speciality Beers – Differently produced

Differently-produced Speciality Beers are those brewed with non-standard ingredients or techniques, as opposed to Flavoured Speciality Beers, which have flavour added. Non-conventional ingredients and techniques are only limited by the brewer's imagination. The following covers some of the more usual ones encountered.

Lager: Up to and including 8.5% ABV

Genuine Lagers are bottom-fermented beers and are 'lagered' (stored) for several weeks, if not months. They can include the following:

- **Pilsners**

Colour

Yellow to gold.

Flavour

Depending on whether it is a German or Czech style Pilsner, the beer may range from light in malt to having a noticeable bready, malt aroma and flavour. Hop flavour should be present from Noble hops, giving fruity notes. Medium to high bitterness depending on the style.

Helles are lower in hop and bitter notes.

- **Vienna Lagers**

Amber in colour with clean malty character and some hoppy bitterness to create balance and a crisp finish. Floral, spicy flavours are minimal.

- **Märzen**

Colour

Tawny to copper.

Flavour

A sweet malty character. Some caramel may be present but with the bitterness providing balance. Lightly hopped.

- **Dark Lagers**

Colour

Brown to black.

Flavour

Roast flavours of chocolate and coffee and some malty sweetness. There is a little hop bitterness and medium to low fruit associated with the hop. This style includes Alts, Dunkels, Schwarzbier and Bocks. Alts are top fermented but at a cool temperature.

- **Kölsch**

Not a lager but is sometimes put into this continental style. Either top fermented or a hybrid of cold and warm fermentation.

Colour

Yellow to gold.

Flavour

Delicate and softly fruity with a clean finish.

Wheat: up to and including 8.5% ABV

Colour

Light in colour (yellows and golds) as in the traditional German 'Weissbier' or 'Weizenbier'. They can also be darker, including dark brown, if dark malts are used e.g. 'Dunkles Weissbier' or 'Dunkelweizen'.

Flavour

These are beers in which a large proportion of wheat is used, resulting often in a cloudy appearance. Hops will be evident throughout balanced by the malts used. The wheat flavour softens the biscuitiness of the malted barley. Esters, clove and banana-like flavours may be particularly evident in the aroma.

Sours: up to and including 8.5% ABV

Colour

Yellow to light brown but may be darker.

Flavour

Wild beers are fermented using organisms other than standard brewer's yeasts to produce acidity as a prominent feature. The acid is usually lactic, which is odourless and tasteless but brings tartness.

Examples of ingredients/factors used include one or more of the following:

- Brettanomyces, which is a yeast and can impart a distinctive tart or rustic-wild character; for some people this is seen as a sharpness and/or reminiscent of farmyards. These include Lambics, Gueuze and beers with fruit such as Kriek and Framboise beers.
- Lactobacilli, which are bacteria imparting a sour and funky character. These may include Gose (with added salt and spices) and Berliner Weisse, which is wheat-based and typically 2.7% - 3.4% ABV.
- Lactic acid

This style also includes Kettle Sours; these are beers that are developed by enzymes being added to the wort.

Saisons: up to and including 7.0%

This style has been adapted from its origins in southern Belgium and north-eastern France.

Colour

Usually, yellow to light brown.

Flavour

Traditionally Spring-brewed Saisons are light and refreshing when drunk young. However, the beer may be aged in oak bringing earthy notes and sometimes a light rustic tang. Earthy, farmyard/funky aromas may be noticeable.

Wood-aged Beers: 6% ABV and above

These are beers that are aged for 6 months or more in wooden casks.

Colour

Any colour.

Flavour

Complex beers, usually full bodied and can be sweet if not fermented/aged out. Flavours associated with the cask used e.g. sherry, rum, whisky, port, wine etc. may be noticeable as well from the oxidation of the malts e.g. caramel, toffee. There may also be flavours from the wood itself. A funky character is also not unknown.

A subset of this category is Sour Aged Beers with flavours associated with sour beers but these may be softer due to ageing.

Smoked: up to and including 8.5% ABV

Any beer where a large proportion of smoked malts is used to impart a distinct smoky flavour.

Colour

They can be any colour but are often darker, browns to blacks, due to the type of the smoked malt used.

Flavour

Malts usually dominate but occasionally hops can balance the smokiness. Includes Rauchbier.



12. Speciality Beers – Flavoured

Flavoured Speciality Beers are beers with a flavour added, as opposed to Differently-produced Speciality Beers, which are brewed with non-standard ingredients or techniques. Flavoured Speciality Beers can be similar to all other styles in that any beer style can be adapted by a flavour addition to become a Speciality.

Fruit: up to and including 8.5%

Fruit beers may be based on any beer style including other styles within Speciality. Fruit or flavourings (syrup or extracts) are added to a base beer to produce a dominant aroma, appearance or taste of that fruit.

Colour

Yellow to black but may be 'non-beer' colours dependent upon the base beer and the fruit being added.

Flavour

The character of the base beer will influence the final taste but must not dominate i.e. the fruit must be noticeably present in the flavour. The wide range of fruit available to brewers means that the taste may range from sour (typical of lemons or some cherries), to bitter (such as bergamot) through to sweet (such as mango or strawberry). Additional sugars may be used to sweeten the beers.



Herbs/Spices and culinary ingredients: up to and including 8.5%

Colour

Yellow to black.

Flavour

The character of the base beer will influence the final taste but must not dominate i.e. the added ingredient must be noticeably present in the flavour. The ingredients may range from spices such as ginger and coriander, herbs or flowers such as mint and elderflower and culinary ingredients, such as vegetables, honey, coffee, chocolate and vanilla, to fortified wines and spirits.

Campaign for Real Ale 2020

For more information on
CAMRA and its activities, visit:
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