

Ullage and Spillage

by J.Random

Garrett Oliver of Brooklyn Brewery says a beer is like a story; it should have a beginning, a middle and an end; so I had better start this story with a beginning.

It begins, I am told, in April at The Craft Brewers' Conference in Austin when Aly says to Rick "We should ask Garrett to supply a cask for an R&B cask night at The Whip." This is, of course, the "marital" we, rather than the royal we, therefore meaning "you should ask." Rick, in his previous career, installed Brooklyn's brewing equipment so Garrett agrees. Months, multiple e-mails and many phone messages later, it is two weeks before the event and importation is looking impossible. Then somebody has the brilliant idea of importing the cask as a sample. A range of Brooklyn Brewery's beers is now available in local liquor stores. Problem: a sample is defined as less than 45.4 litres. Solution: the cask is 40l. Problem: the cask misses Brooklyn Brewery's regular truck. Solution: Fedex. Problem: Fedex wants to know R&B's brokers and the answer is UPS. Not an ideal situation. Problem: UPS needs an invoice from the importer for the border paperwork. Solution: importer says he has sent it. Problem: UPS says they have not received it. Solution: importer sends another. Problem: UPS does not receive it. Finally, UPS calls R&B to say they don't have authorization to transport alcohol into Canada. *Now* they figure that out? It is now the day before the Wednesday event. Garrett is here but the cask is in Kent, WA south of SeaTac.

Enter Rick Dellow, international man of misery. Rick is already on his way to Anacortes to pick up the IPA for the following Sunday's cask night. Aly appraises Rick of the situation and he heroically sets off for Kent, driving as far as he can through the night before sparking out at a Quality Inn somewhere just off the I5. The next morning, inside the Fedex warehouse, the cask is discovered in a small puddle of beer surrounded by a cloud of fruit flies. Not good. The shive had clearly come loose then hammered back in. Rick has no choice but to take

it anyway. Through the mystifying machinations of the brewer's network, an invoice is conjured up and Rick is off to the border with 80 litres of beer and a couple of bottles of stout. Not surprisingly, he is waved to the office to encounter a typical example of our doughty border guards. Rick explained it is for a party. "That's a lot of beer," says Mr. Border Guard, not afraid of stating the obvious. Rick says "Yes it is," not wanting to disagree. He dutifully pays \$216 and enters Canada at 1pm. The cask is due to be tapped at The Whip at 4.00 pm, so with Aly and Barry running interference, Rick drives for the Whip at top speed, arriving to present a well shaken cask of warm beer at 2.30. Huge bags of ice are employed to bring the cask down to drinking temperature and with all fingers, toes, legs and eyes crossed, it is tapped.

Miraculously, while a tad cloudy, Garrett's BLAST IPA is in way better condition than it deserves to be, and is highly enjoyed by the assembled masses. And, masses of people there are, considering it is 4.00 pm on a Wednesday afternoon. He tells us the recipe came about after a heated discussion over the relative merits of British and Pacific NW hop varieties. Since New York is the halfway point, Garrett felt it appropriate to put them together. BLAST marries a total of eight hop varieties: Ahtanum, Cascade, Willamette, Palisade, East Kent Golding, Northdown, Challenger and Fuggles. Garrett is a great believer in the need for balance in beer, thus is a brewer after my own heart. This was not designed as an extreme beer and BLAST has enough maltiness to support 70 IBU and 8.2% abv.

Also available are bottles of Brooklyn Local 1, a superb saison, and their Black Chocolate stout, with an outstanding aroma. The Whip supplies a cheese plate and duck spring rolls (the duck story is similar to, but not as dramatic as, the cask story). Several copies of Garrett's book, *The Brewmaster's Table*, are raffled and signed by the author. By 5.30 the reverberations of the BLAST have died away and we are enjoying the slightly balsamic, big raspberry punch of Iain Hill's latest Frambozen in warm sunshine on the patio.

Talk about messing with the tastebuds, no sooner is the Frambozen running out than a cask



Barry Benson, Garrett Oliver, Allyson Tomlin and Rick Dellow (Photo by Rick Green)

of Dark Star stout is tapped. This is the final trial version of a new product R&B will be launching in September along with a Belgian ale, brewed to celebrate their 10th anniversary. Dark Star is named for Jamie, a much loved member of the R&B staff who sadly passed away last year. There is no allusion to the movie of the same name (see it if you get the chance), which is a pity because “let there be light” would be a great slogan for a stout. And as for the debut? What can I say but, another ambrosia joins the glorious pantheon of oatmeal stouts from the province of B.C. (*see Ullage and Spillage, What’s Brewing November 2006*). This is a session, rather than a sipping stout, at 4.6% abv, moderate bitterness and plenty of malt to soften the roasty edge. I just hope they can reproduce this flavour profile after scale up. If you get this edition in time, look for a keg of Dark Star stout at the Great Canadian Beer Festival. I might well be standing next to it.

That is just August 8. Four days later, we are treated to the Anacortes IPA, which has more time to settle down after the week’s earlier events. A classic Pacific NW IPA; mouth puckering good.

The following Sunday at The Whip sees us

sampling a cask of Big River ESB. This one also has quite the story of disaster and redemption. This is his first go at cask conditioning, so Damon, with some trepidation, follows instructions to the letter. He is rewarded with a beer shampoo and a hop cone scalp massage. OK who wrote pull the shive to insert finings after the conditioning period? Not surprisingly, the result is rather less carbonation and a lot less hop flavour than he intended. Nevertheless, a creditable effort for a first attempt and an impressive recovery. This is a pretty accurate rendition of an English ESB and well worth seeking out. We don’t typically see these guys at beer festivals so this event is a real treat. This is a beer I wish I could sample more often. I don’t drink and drive and the buses from downtown to Richmond’s Riverport are no longer direct since the start of the 98 B-line. Perhaps when the RAV line is finished, and the B-line discontinued, we will again sit at the window in Big River with one eye on the bus stop, awaiting the right moment to sup up, before being whisked direct downtown in one of Vancouver’s finest loser cruisers.

Hat’s off to the R&B crew for making these events possible. §