

Alvinne Borinage

'Borinage' is the historical name for a region of Belgium in the Hainaut province, in the south west of the country. It extends from the town of Mons to the French border, and was the coal mining region in the 1800's.

With this collaborative beer, Alvinne and their colleagues from Cervesa Guineu in Spain pay tribute to the miners of this region which is held to be the birthplace of the almost forgotten – but currently trending – beer style of Grisette.

It was intended to be a refreshing beer for the miners, so 25-30% malted wheat and spelt is used, along with Hallertau Magnum hops for bittering and Mount Hood for aroma. And of course their mixed fermentation Morpheus yeast, which is typical of the yeast at the time.

The result is a straw coloured beer, with a slightly cloudy body. Crisp grainy malt, a little barnyard funk and a sustained level of hop bitterness. The Morpheus yeast contributes a tartness as well, and the beer is bone dry with a high carbonation.

Style: Grisette
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Brouwerij Alvinne
Alcohol Content (ABV): 4.5% (1.17 Std Drinks)



Troubadour Magma Special Edition 2017 – Hop Twist



Fans of Troubadour's Magma – of which there are many – will know that once a year, the guys play around with their flagship beer. From changing hops, to changing malts and introducing different yeasts to the base beer, it is always interesting to see what they have come up with each year.

2015 saw the Tripel-Spiked Brett version, which was by far my personal favourite. Last year saw the addition of Maris Otter premium malt into the recipe, and this was a delicious beer as well. (There is still a couple of cartons hanging around, we will make them available in the 'Extra Beers' section).

I must admit I was slightly disappointed to learn that 2017's variant was simply changing the quantities of malt and hops in the recipe. It seemed a little low-key for something that is anticipated all year.

But I'm please to say I very much enjoyed the beer nonetheless. It really is now an IPA, with much less of a Belgian yeast aspect to me. A smaller malt body (hence the reduction in ABV), but still a little caramalt body to carry those hops.

And the hops are the showpiece now, still with the piney and fruity aromas of passionfruit and apricot, with an earthy hop bitterness and dry finish. It's a very enjoyable beer; wonder what they'll do in 2018?!

Style: Belgian IPA
Country: Belgium
Brewer: Brouwerij De Musketiers
Alcohol Content (ABV): 7.0% (1.82 Std Drinks)

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White Pony Speech Impediment

We think we are doing our bit for international relations with this beer from White Pony. It is an American style Imperial India Brown Ale, from an Italian brewer who makes much of his beer at Belgian breweries.

So no surprise that White Pony brew an imperial version of something, Rob does love his big beers.

It pours a slightly murky orange brown colour. There isn't a lot of hop character in the aroma, which you might expect. Rather it is dominated by sweet malts.

The flavour follows suit, lots of sweet bready, caramel malts, a little nuttiness with hints of dried fruits. There is a firm bitterness there, and the beer finishes reasonably dry.

While I'd personally like a more assertive hop character to lift up the body of the beer, this will probably please the malt lovers out there. And it has got one of the best beer names I've seen in a while!

Style: Imperial India Brown Ale

Country: Italo-Belgian

Brewer: White Pony Microbirrificio

Alcohol Content (ABV): 8.5% (2.21 Std Drinks)



De Dolle Boskeun



Boskeun is known as a Passbier, a beer brewed seasonally at Easter time. Historically, Belgium had many Easter beers, in a wide variety of styles from light to dark. But as many traditions do, this one died such that there was only one brewery – Slagmuylder - producing an annual Easter Beer.

Then in 1983, De Dolle began brewing Boskeun. And for a long time there were only two, though there are now quite a few breweries making a Paasbier.

If you wanted an example of a typical Belgian yeast aroma, stick your nose in the glass and inhale. Deep aromas of banana, vanilla, a little pineapple, a bit of bubblegum and hints of spice. It is what stands these Belgian beers out as being unique. You can smell them a mile away.

It is pretty much a tripel style beer, with a rich malty body, tropical fruits and citrus, hints of honey, a lovely spiciness from the yeast and a growing bitterness as the beer progresses. The mouthfeel is quite heavy, but finishes dry, thanks to the use of cane sugar. And after the fact, the gentle alcohol warmth works its way down, finally giving up the well-hidden ABV.

The label shows a Easter Bunny, and the name Boskeun actually means 'rabbit of the wood'. So enjoy this tasty little treat, even if we are a couple of months early with this one.

Style: Paasbier (Easter Beer)

Country: Belgium

Brewer: De Dolle Brouwers

Alcohol Content (ABV): 9.0% (2.34 Std Drinks)

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Ganstaller Affumicator

When you think of German beers, most commonly you imagine a delicate Hefeweizen, a crisp Kölsch or a seasonal Märzen. But for me, the first beer I'll always scan a menu for is a tasty German Doppelbock.

A Bock is a strong German lager, popularised by the Munich brewers in the 17th Century, but originally dating back a further few hundred years to the German town of Einbeck.

A Doppelbock is just a 'double' Bock – a bigger grain bill, and therefore a bigger, thicker body higher in alcohol. And super tasty!

We were delighted to see Ganstaller's offering also included smoked malt. And while smoky beers can often be very divisive, this particular beer – though smoke is strong in the aroma - integrates the smoky character into the rich malt body so well, I'm hoping it won't upset any anti-Rauch-ers.

The aroma is smoked bacon, wood and dark berries. The flavour is rich, sweet caramel malt, raisins, dark fruits, chocolate, smoked meats and an earthy hop bitterness. All combined in an amazingly balanced way. I like this beer!

Did you know: the original beer from Einbeck gradually became known as 'ein bock' which means 'a buck' or goat. And if you have a look on many German bock labels, you'll see an image of a goat!



Style: Doppelbock (Smoked)

Country: Germany

Brewer: Ganstaller-Brau

Alcohol Content (ABV): 9.6% (2.50 Std Drinks)

De Molen Horen, Zien & Zwijgen

This is one of De Molen's Boreft Festival beers from late last year. Each year at their festival, the guys brew 20+ different beers as one-offs. Very rarely are any of them ever seen again, such is the creative nature of De Molen's former home-brewer owners.

The beer is described as an Imperial Banana Choco Porter. But no bananas were harmed in the making of this beer!

It is an imperial porter with cocoa added into the mix. The beer has a really creamy, unctuous feel, like a banana smoothy does (suggestive thinking). But as the beer warms, the roasted malts come out of hiding, along with dark, bitter chocolate and the slightest coffee note.

There is a medium-high carbonation, which adds a little prickly feeling on the tongue, with a solid hop bitterness as well. The banana comes in the form of esters from the yeast. An interesting beer that hides its alcohol really well.

And the name? It translates as 'Hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil'. Look for the three wise monkeys on the label.

Style: Imperial Porter

Country: The Netherlands

Brewer: Brouwerij De Molen

Alcohol Content (ABV): 9.5% (2.47 Std Drinks)



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