

Rulles Pils

When you think of Belgian beers, a crisp pilsner probably isn't the beer style that would first come to mind. For a country that seems to boast more beer styles than any other, the pilsner isn't what they are renowned for.

But the numbers behind the Belgian beer market tell us that the Belgians (much like the rest of the world) favour the bottom-fermented lager styles over any other.

Around 70% of Belgian beer consumption is of lagers/pilsners. And by far the leading beer is Jupiler which dominates with around 40% of the domestic market. Sit in any town square and take a look around and you'll see the majority of drinkers enjoying their Jupiler pils.

A beer that you'd never see is the Rulles Pils, despite the fact I think this is one of the best Belgian pilsners I've had.

A pale straw colour with an aroma of grainy malt and grassy, herbaceous hops. A crisp and dry body with a nice malty backbone, the classic German Mittelfrüh hops providing the herbal character along with the solid bitterness. And there is something a little rustic with the slightest hint of funk. Refreshing and interesting at the same time, this is a beer you could enjoy a few pints of.

Style: Pilsner

Country: Belgium

Brewer: Brasserie Artisanale de Rulles

Alcohol Content (ABV): 4.8% (1.25 Std Drinks)



Uiltje Pinky And The Grain

We've now become used to brewers putting a variety of fruits into our IPA's, but pink hibiscus flowers are a little less common. That's Uiltje though, always striving to come up with something new and interesting.

But does the novelty factor make this a good beer?

We know Uiltje are masters at making hoppy beers, they are recognised as the best IPA brewery in The Netherlands.

It pours a hazy, orange golden colour (no real sign of pink to be honest!), with a foamy white top. An aroma of light grain and a little tropical fruit invite you to taste the beer.

There is a little early malt sweetness, though it doesn't really last that long. The hop combination for this beer is Magnum, Loral and Talus, and they offer some tropical fruit and a good level of bitterness. And then somewhere in behind is the hibiscus, contributing a little something floral or even herbal.

The beer finishes reasonably dry with a lingering bitterness. This isn't my favourite Uiltje hoppy beer by any means, but it is an easy drinking IPA with a good dose of flavour and that something a little different.

Style: Hibiscus IPA

Country: Netherlands

Brewer: Brouwerij het Uiltje

Alcohol Content (ABV): 6.9% (1.80 Std Drinks)



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Inselbrau Baltic Dubbel

There is always a sense of expectation with the Inselbrau beers. Wrapped more beautifully than most of the presents I gifted for Christmas, I think I missed a trick by not including this beer in the December pack last month!

If you are new to the beers of the Insel-Brauerie, they are a small German brewery on an island in the Baltic Sea. Hence many of their beers are called 'Baltic'. That is their naming convention, though there is always something interesting about the beers; something that sets them apart from those of a similar brew style.

Our beer this month is the Baltic Dubbel, and straight away the thing that stands out as different is the ABV for a Belgian style dubbel. The Germans like them big!

It pours quite a thick viscous black liquid and settles to be quite still. The aroma is full of caramel malts and lots of dried dark fruits with maybe a little earthy, nutty hint.

With a malt base of barley, wheat and rye, as well as dextrose, the beer has a very full body, with lots of caramel malt, chocolate, roasted malt, and also very fruity giving raisins, figs and prunes. Good carbonation and some herbal spicing lift the mouthfeel toward a tasty, slightly prickly finish.

Style: Belgian Dubbel

Country: Germany

Brewer: Rügenger Insel-Brauerie

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



Straffe Hendrik Tripel

This is a beer with an interesting history. It was first brewed in 1981 by the Halve Maan Brewery, however the label was lost to Brouwerij Riva in 1988. It was then acquired by Liefmans, until that brewery's bankruptcy in 2007, when the business was bought by Duvel-Moortgat.

De Halve Maan saw an opportunity to re-acquire its old label, and in 2008 a deal was done to purchase the brand from Duvel. So after bouncing around the Belgian countryside, the label is finally back where it began.

De Halve Maan is the brewery right in the centre of Bruges, better known for their Brugse Zot beers. 'Strong Henry' was the name given to this beer, which is a mix of six specialty malts along with Styrian Golding and Saaz hops.

This is one of my favourite tripels. It pours darker than your standard tripel, with a nose of fruit, malt, Belgian yeast and spice. This all comes through in the flavour too.

There is an early fruit and malt sweetness, with banana, orange and apricot. There is a stickiness to the mouthfeel that hints at honey (though it isn't there to my knowledge). A good level of hop bitterness lifts the mouthfeel, with a hint of resinous hop character. The yeast is also a hero here, coming in with a good prickly spice.

Not as celebrated as some of Belgium's tripels, but every bit as good as most (though Westmalle Tripel is still my champion).

Style: Belgian Tripel

Country: Belgium

Brewer: Brouwerij De Halve Maan

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



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Kees Dark & Stormy

A few years ago, we included Kees' Wee Heavy in our packs. It was a delicious Scotch Ale, hitting all the right notes. But in true Kees fashion, he kept tweaking the beer and we can now present the new and improved 'Dark & Stormy'.

Scotch Ales – colloquially known as 'Wee Heavys' – are part of the family of Strong Ales, which includes styles like Old Ales, Burton Ales and Barley Wines. These styles developed regionally in the UK, with the creation of the Scotch Ale attributed to Edinburgh in the 1800's.

This big beer is very dark brown to black in colour, with a small off-white head. The aroma is all malt – lots of roasted notes, caramel and an abundance of dried fruits.

As you'd expect, the malt is the hero of this beer. The body is reasonably heavy with lots of dark bread and rye character. It is also heavy on the dark dried fruits with hints of raisins, prunes, figs and undertones of something earthy or even woody.

I don't honestly remember the other beer that well, but I'm more than happy this iteration.

Style: Scotch Ale

Country: Netherlands

Brewer: Brouwerij Kees

Alcohol Content (ABV): 9.2% (2.40 Std Drinks)



De Molen Yuzu & Kuzu

Something a little different here from De Molen. It is not that often we get to include a triple IPA – it isn't a style that is made frequently by our brewery partners. It was too tempting to order some of this when I saw it available.

As you may have picked up from the name, this beer has yuzu as an ingredient. I've tried a few IPAs that include yuzu and it seems to suit the style well. It is an Asian citrus fruit, probably somewhere in taste between grapefruit and mandarin.

But until reading the beer description I didn't even know kuzu was an ingredient. Apparently kuzu is an Asian root vegetable, used as a thickening agent. It is also commonly used in Japanese tea for its medicinal qualities.

Our beer pours like a normal glowing IPA, and the aroma is full of citrus fruit. Heavy on the yuzu, but no real contribution from the kuzu here.

Sweetness from the big malt body combines with fruit sweetness makes for a pleasant start. But it doesn't take long for the yuzu to kick in. There is a definite citrus character to this beer, both from the yuzu and the hops. The yuzu gives that slightly sharp but still pleasant edge, slightly herbal even, and this comes out a little more as you work into the beer. The mouthfeel is quite full, and we'll attribute a little of this to the kuzu making it creamier than it otherwise would be.

It is hard to hide the alcohol in these high ABV light coloured beers, De Molen do a great job of this. There is a warmth from the alcohol but there really isn't any burn and the beer finishes full with a very pleasant citrus bitterness.

Style: Tripel IPA

Country: Netherlands

Brewer: Brouwerij De Molen

Alcohol Content (ABV): 12.0% (3.12 Std Drinks)



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