

# Ullage and Spillage

by J.Random

“English people drink warm beer.” Some say it is because they have Lucas refrigerators (all hail Joe Lucas, Prince of Darkness). If you believe that old fable, stop reading this article because you can dismiss everything else I am going to say. In fact my beer fridge is a converted wine cabinet, set at 15°C for my collection of Canadian micro-brews. These English-style ales should be served cool, around 5°C below room temperature, which was 20°C in a typical pub of old. Indeed, some of the best beer I ever tasted came up by jug from casks stored in a cellar cut into a chalk hillside. The damp chalk kept the temperature just right year round. Now most English pubs seem to be overheated and serve ice cold beer. There is even a lager, developed in England, designed to be served at -2.5°C. At that temperature, there is no way the tastebuds can be detecting any flavour. But then again, that may be the point.

I remember reading somewhere that marketers at the brewing conglomerates discovered people would drink more and more beer, the less and less flavour it had in it. There was something about a beer with little flavour that left one wanting more. It was the ideal business move. The first step was a reduction in the more expensive ingredients such as malt and hops. The alcohol content was kept up using corn and rice to ensure the lack of judgement that maintained the impression more beer would actually satisfy the craving. A little touch of residual sweetness compensated for low malt content and further reduced the character. The key, however, was chilling the beer to virtually eliminate the remaining flavour. This allowed for increased carbonation which further dumbed down the malt and hop character leaving primarily the sensation of cold carbonic acid. The ultimate expression of this trend is the alco-pop. The bubbles in the stomach provide a temporarily full sensation that dies away rapidly requiring more beer to maintain it. Serving beer cold has the added advantage to the serving establishment of hiding any off flavours introduced through dirty lines. The trend to colder beer occurred much earlier in North America than

it did in the UK and the development of English lager was probably influenced as much by Carling Black Label as it was by continental pilsners.

Beer advertising now focuses on the degree of chilling as the primary feature of the product. The funny thing is the temperature is not even an attribute the manufacturer has contributed to the beer. Either the pub or the purchaser controls the temperature at which the beer is drunk. The best thing the manufacturer can say is—make sure you can’t taste it. However, it is not surprising the average drinker of mass-market product thinks all beer must be kept refrigerated. The high volume product of the conglomerates does taste absolutely disgusting if allowed to warm up. My rule is, if you could not bear to drink it at room temperature, don’t drink it cold.

Don’t get me wrong, there is nothing wrong with an ice cold beer in the right place at the right time. For me, the right places are all a long way south of the 49th parallel and the right time is lunchtime with an ambient temperature of 30°C. Even then, my favourite tippie is likely to be Negro Modelo or Kona Brewing’s pipeline porter depending on location.

Despite the advertising slogans, I can’t believe there is anything inherently Canadian about drinking ice-cold beer. In most of the country for much of the year, a hot cup of coffee makes way more sense, accounting for the ever increasing number of coffee shops. While I am frequently delighted these days by the availability of micro-brews in pubs and restaurants I am often disappointed at the temperature at which they are served. The other day, a group of us were sitting at the bar in The Whip examining the ice trough for keeping full beer glasses chilled and wondering why there was not an adjacent warming trough for the good stuff.

All this to say that anything we can do to convince people to drink beer cool rather than ice cold will encourage the demand for better tasting beers.

## DRINK COOL BEER!