

Hop lovers look to put the flavour back into beer!

Too many bland, tasteless beers along with plenty of others described as “hoppy” when they blatantly aren’t are the inspiration behind Sheffield’s newest beer makers, Steel City Brewing.

Dave Szwejkowski (30) and Gazza Prescott (39) are the men behind this new venture which aims to put the hops back into British beer. The two have been friends for many years and share a mutual delight in both beer and travel; both are hardened “scoopers” – drinkers who travel the world trying as many beers as possible in a search for their “perfect pint” – and both have been involved with beer ever since they were old enough to drink with Dave having been brewer at the award-winning Moor brewery in Somerset whilst Gazza has been a cellarman, bar manager, home brewer and even brewery assistant in his time!

Both love hops (the flowers of the hopbine, part of the cannabis family) and, after exhaustive “research” – thinly disguised as drinking – all around the UK, have come to the conclusion that British brewers just don’t use enough of them! “I’ve loved hops ever since the early 1990’s when innovative brewers like Sean Franklin and Brendan Dobbin opened my eyes to the flavours possible by using exotic varieties, and I think it’s fair to say they have become my beery obsession” explains Gazza, whilst Dave recently brewed a beer at local brewery Mallinsons, a brewery not averse to hops themselves, called “Let there be Hops!”. Dave says “It was on my first trip to America that I really discovered the world of hops, unfortunately this discovery left me even more disillusioned with the UK beer scene and set me thinking: just why is it that hardly anyone in Britain brews that kind of beer? Unfortunately, the poor hop harvest a couple of years ago has made most UK brewers even more stingy with the hops!”

So rather than moaning into their hop-less pints – although it has been said that they do a fair bit of that anyway – the pair decided to do something about it and have teamed up with Pete Roberts at Sheffield’s newest craft brewery to turn their dream into reality. Gazza says “Pete’s beers are well-brewed, full of flavour and it gives me a lot of pleasure to be brewing with someone so obviously at the top of his game” whilst Dave says “There’s any number of small breweries starting up over the last few years and it’s great to be working with one of the minority that prioritise quality output over cost-cutting”.

As you’d expect from blokes who like their hops their first beer won’t be pulling any punches; at 5% and with a staggering 80 bitterness units – over four times more than most standard bitters – this promises to be a real “hop bomb” for all those who like their beer bitter. Don’t think it’s just about throwing in bucketloads of hops and crossing fingers, though, as the pair have some tricks up their sleeve such as “first-wort hopping” which Gazza describes as “an old German trick from the last century which gives a smoother, fuller hop flavour” and extra-pale malt to give the beer a perfect brilliance in the glass.

After the initial testbrews are complete a separate company will be set up to enable the pair to concentrate fully on their plans to bring hops to discerning drinkers. The catch? both are reluctant to give up their day jobs just yet so plan to brew once a month and sell the beer to those who appreciate the same flavours as they do, although neither has ruled out going full-time if the enterprise really takes off; “There are beer lovers throughout the UK desperate for hoppy beer” says Gazza “and, with Steel City Brewing, we intend to give them just what they want!”

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