



AUSTRALIANS CAN AND DO

Chris Canty finds a few canny Australian brewers...

For Chuck Hahn and Coopers' Nick Sterenberg, the lack of beers in cans all comes down to image.

"I think all craft beer should always be placed into bottles – and brown bottles at that," Chuck says, producer of James Squire Golden Ale in a can, that is only sold on Qantas flights.

"Cans just don't carry that premium image that we would always seek for our beers. Though a number of craft brewers in the USA are going all cans and are attempting to change that 'less than premium' image that cans seem to carry."

Nick who produces Cooper's Dr Tim's in a can (only available in South Australia), says that despite the negative image some new can designs are making in-roads.

"Think about Guinness in a can," he says.

"Can manufactures are trying to come up with new shapes to look premium. Look at Kronenberg 1664 355 and the 330 Euro-sleek can."

Despite the negative perceptions, Chuck maintains that the can has its advantages and raises the point that beer should be poured into a glass anyway.

"They do protect the beer from sunlight and are easy to carry and store," he says. "We also promote the enjoyment of our beers in proper glassware. This gives the consumer an opportunity to enjoy the aromas and flavours in a much better fashion. If a glass is available, I guess it doesn't really matter whether it is poured out of a can or a bottle."

Nick says that cans have created challenges for Coopers but have also led to creating a world first, referring to his unique can conditioned beer.

"I know of no other brewery that makes can conditioned beer," he says. "There are a number of technical challenges to overcome. The first is the sterility and a high standard of hygiene that is required if you are not going to pasteurise the beer. The second is the low level of dissolved CO2 in the beer before conditioning, normally the CO2 pressure helps give strength to the can. Without it they can be easily damaged."

However the main question people want to know is – do cans affect the taste?

"The cans have an internal lining so there should be no difference to the beer from a bottle," Nick says. "When we produce Dr Tim's in a can we are performing a fermentation and then the size and shape of the container will make a slight difference."

Both maintain however that installing a can line might be out of reach for most small brewers.

"Most do not have access to a can line and this calls for additional capital which most small brewers do not have," Chuck says.

Despite the lack of beer in cans in Australia, Chuck has been surprised and overwhelmed by the feedback.

"This has been a great success for James Squire," he says. "Some of the flight attendants have told me that even on their international flights it competes with Heineken for popularity."

that New Belgium Brewing, one of the largest American craft brewers, is canning its popular Fat Tire Amber Ale, expect to see many more beers in cans in the future.

The biggest challenge is unmaking the dogmatic perception of beer in cans as an evil. It's a persistent prejudice, but is slowly beginning to change as the advantages to canned beer become more widely known. They keep out all UV light, avoiding the skunky taste of clear and green glass. Cans have lower oxygen levels, meaning longer shelf life. They won't break; they chill faster and can be taken more places, especially where glass is prohibited. And they're more environmentally friendly, using less packaging plus more of the can is recyclable, with more used in manufacturing recycled cans. Cans are also lighter, resulting in lower transportation costs and fewer fossil fuels needed.

But in the end, the only thing that matters is how the beer tastes. Side-by-side can vs. draft taste tests reveal that it is virtually impossible to tell the difference. That, coupled with the real advantages of the packaging, means that craft beer in cans is where the future of craft beer is heading. ☐

