Ancient beer style breaks out of Yorkshire

09/02/2025 by Roger Protz

Industry

Stingo is busting out all over. An ancient beer style, largely forgotten and confined to Yorkshire, its county of origin, is now making an appearance in other parts of the UK. It’s a beer with a long pedigree and it’s not the first time it has travelled south. Between the 18th and 20th centuries, a large pub with its own brewery in London’s Marylebone district was called the Yorkshire Stingo. Ex-patriate Yorkshire people along with locals would gather in large numbers – often as many as 20,000 – to play games in the pub’s garden and drink stingo – a name that’s thought to come from the sting or kick that strong alcohol gives. The pub was demolished in 1964 to make way for the Marylebone flyover but stingo was taken up by the major London brewer Watneys, which produced it until it went out of business in 1979. Yorkshire Stingo has made a comeback in its native region. Christian Horton, head brewer at Samuel Smith’s in Tadcaster, has brewed an 8 per cent ABV interpretation of the style since 2006. He thinks it may have fallen from favour during World War One when brewers couldn’t afford to make strong beers as a result of punitive levels of duty imposed by the government to help finance the armaments industry. His version is aged for a year in oak vessels, some of which are more than 100 years old. It’s brewed with British ale malt and darker Munich malt that adds both colour and a touch of sweetness. The hops are Fuggles, Goldings, Phoenix and Styrian Goldings. It’s the brewery’s only bottle-conditioned beer and has delicious aromas and flavours of oak, vanilla, butterscotch, raisin fruit and spicy hops. Rooster's brewery in Harrogate has introduced a remarkable version of stingo. The brewery, founded in 1993 and bought by Ian Fozard in 2011, is now run by his sons Tom and Oliver. Its Stingo is 9 per cent and was brewed four years ago. It was matured in tank but then transferred to former Pinot Noir wine and bourbon whiskey casks where it rested for nine months before returning to tank prior to packaging. The highly complex beer is brewed with Golden Promise pale malt, Munich, crystal and dark crystal malts with flaked barley and Demerara sugar. The single hop is Admiral. It has a bronze colour with oak, burnt fruit, roasted grain and spicy hops on the aroma. The rich palate is dominated by vinous fruit, oak, juicy malt and spicy hops. The long, bittersweet finish has sweet malt to the fore but is balanced by oak, fruit and hops. Stingo had travelled south earlier. Two breweries in Northampton, Phipps and NBC, both brewed the style. They had the misfortune to be bought and closed by Watney, but their beers have been revived by the Albion brewery that makes a 9.5 per cent stingo. The beer is aged in whisky casks for a year with one version aged for five times as long. It’s robust, with rich vinous, oak and hop notes. Stingo has been produced since the 1960s by the major Dorset brewery Hall & Woodhouse, famous for its Badger ales. It’s one of the oldest breweries in Britain, dating from 1777, and is committed to traditional beer styles. Its current version of stingo is called Teamwork and commemorates members of the family who have left a powerful imprint on the brewery. The current version is 9 per cent and the label has images of John and Edward Woodhouse, former head brewer and chairman respectively. It’s brewed with pale, crystal and chocolate malts and is hopped with Target, Progress, Fuggles and Centennial varieties. It has rich butterscotch and vinous notes on aroma and palate and is similar in flavour and character to port and sherry. Stingo beers belong to a class known as barley wines, and they have a heritage going back many centuries to a time when Britain was endlessly at war with France and patriots refused to drink the enemy’s wine. That enmity is now behind us but the historic beer style it created has survived and has been revived. The beers above are available from the breweries’ online shops. Pictured: Oliver (left) and Tom Fozard at Rooster’s (Matthew Curtis, Pellicle).