

BCJP 2021 Guidelines Beer

17. STRONG BRITISH ALE

This category contains stronger, non-roasty ales of the British Isles. Covers the style space above bitters, milds, and brown ales while excluding porters and stouts.

17A. British Strong Ale

Overall Impression: An ale of respectable alcoholic strength, traditionally bottled-conditioned and cellared. Can have a wide range of interpretations, but most will have varying degrees of malty richness, late hops and bitterness, fruity esters, and alcohol warmth. The malt and adjunct flavors and intensity can vary widely, but any combination should result in an agreeable palate experience.

Aroma: Malty-sweet with fruity esters, often with a complex blend of dried-fruit, caramel, nuts, toffee, or other specialty malt aromas. Some alcohol notes are acceptable, but shouldn't be hot or solventy. Hop aromas can vary widely, but typically have earthy, resinous, fruity, or floral notes. The balance can vary widely, but most examples will have a blend of malt, fruit, hops, and alcohol in varying intensities.

Appearance: Amber to dark reddish-brown color; many are fairly dark. Generally clear, although darker versions may be almost opaque. Moderate to low cream- to light tan-colored head with average retention.

Flavor: Medium to high malt character often rich with nutty, toffee, or caramel flavors. Light chocolate notes are sometimes found in darker beers. May have interesting flavor complexity from brewing sugars. Balance is often malty, but may be well hopped, which affects the impression of maltiness. Moderate fruity esters are common, often with a dark fruit or dried fruit character. The finish may vary from medium dry to somewhat sweet. Alcoholic strength should be evident, not overwhelming. Low diacetyl optional, but generally not desirable.

Mouthfeel: Medium to full, chewy body. Alcohol warmth is often evident and always welcome. Low to moderate carbonation. Smooth texture.

Comments: An entry category more than a style; the strength and character of examples can vary widely. Fits in the style space between normal gravity beers and Barley Wines. Can include pale malty-hoppy beers, English winter warmers, strong dark milds, smaller Burton ales, and other unique beers in the general gravity range that don't fit other categories. Judges should allow for a significant range in character, as long as the beer is within the alcohol strength range and has an interesting 'British' character, it likely fits the style.

History: A collection of unrelated minor styles, each of which has its own heritage. Do not use this category grouping to infer a historical relationship between examples – none is intended. This is a modern British specialty judging category where the 'special' attribute is alcohol level.

Characteristic Ingredients: Grists vary, often based on pale malt with caramel and specialty malts. Some darker examples suggest a light use of dark malts (e.g., chocolate, black malt). Sugary and starchy adjuncts (e.g., maize, flaked barley, wheat) are common. Finishing hops are traditionally English.

Style Comparison: Significant overlap in gravity with Old Ale, but not having an aged character. A wide range of interpretations is possible. Should not be as rich or strong as an English Barley Wine. Stronger than the stronger everyday Strong Bitter, British Brown Ale, and English Porter. More specialty malt or sugar character than American Strong Ale.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.055 – 1.080 IBUs: 30 – 60 FG: 1.015 – 1.022 SRM: 8 – 22 ABV: 5.5 – 8.0%

Commercial Examples: Fuller's 1845, Harvey's Elizabethan Ale, J.W. Lees Moonraker, McEwan's Champion, Samuel Smith's Winter Welcome, Shepherd Neame 1698

Tags: high-strength, amber-color, top-fermented, british-isles, traditional-style, strong-ale-family, malty

17B. Old Ale

Overall Impression: A stronger-than-average English ale, though usually not as strong or rich as an English Barley Wine, but usually malty. Warming. Shows positive maturation effects of a well-kept, aged beer.

Aroma: Malty-sweet with fruity esters, often with a complex blend of dried fruit, vinous, caramel, molasses, toffee, light treacle, or other specialty malt aromas. Some alcohol and nutty oxidative notes are acceptable, akin to those found in Sherry, Port, or Madeira. Hop aroma not usually present.

Appearance: Deep amber to very dark reddish-brown color, but most are fairly dark. Age and oxidation may darken the beer further. Clear, but can be almost opaque. Moderate to low cream- to light tan-colored head; retention average to poor.

Flavor: Medium to high malt character with a luscious malt complexity, often with nut, caramel, or molasses-like flavors. Light chocolate or roasted malt flavors are optional, but should never be prominent. Balance is often malty-sweet, but may be well hopped; the impression of bitterness often depends on amount of aging. Moderate to high fruity esters are common,

and may take on a dried-fruit or vinous character. The finish may vary from dry to somewhat sweet. Extended aging may contribute oxidative flavors similar to a fine old Sherry, Port, or Madeira. Alcoholic strength should be evident, though not overwhelming. Low diacetyl optional.

Mouthfeel: Medium to full, chewy body, although older examples may be lower in body due to continued attenuation during conditioning. Alcohol warmth is often evident and always welcome. Low to moderate carbonation, depending on age and conditioning. Light acidity may be present, as well as some tannin if wood-aged; both are optional.

Comments: Strength and character vary widely. The predominant defining quality for this style is the impression of age, which can manifest itself in different ways (complexity, oxidation, leather, vinous qualities, etc.). Many of these qualities are otherwise faults, but if the resulting character of the beer is pleasantly drinkable and complex, then those characteristics are acceptable. In no way should those allowable characteristics be interpreted as making an undrinkably off-flavored beer as somehow in style. Old Peculier is a well-known but fairly unique beer that is quite different than other Old Ales.

History: Historically, an aged ale used as stock ales for blending or enjoyed at full strength (stale or stock refers to beers that were aged or stored for a significant period of time). There are at least two definite types in Britain today, weaker, unaged draught ones that are similar to milds of around 4.5%, and stronger aged ones that are often 6-8% or more.

Characteristic Ingredients: Composition varies, although generally similar to British Strong Ales. The age character is the biggest driver of the final style profile, which is more handling than brewing.

Style Comparison: Roughly overlapping the British Strong Ale and the lower end of the English Barley Wine styles, but always having an aged quality. The distinction between an Old Ale and a Barley Wine is somewhat arbitrary above 7% ABV, and generally means having a more significant aged quality.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.055 – 1.088 IBUs: 30 – 60 FG: 1.015 – 1.022 SRM: 10 – 22 ABV: 5.5 – 9.0%

Commercial Examples: Avery Old Jubilation, Berlina Old Ale, Greene King Strong Suffolk Ale, Marston Owd Roger, Theakston Old Peculier

Tags: high-strength, amber-color, top-fermented, british-isles, traditional-style, strong-ale-family, malty, aged

17C. Wee Heavy

See Category 14 Scottish Ale introduction for general characteristics of Scottish beer.

Overall Impression: Rich, sweet malt depth with caramel, toffee, and fruity flavors. Full-bodied and chewy, with warming alcohol. Restrained bitterness, but not cloying or syrupy.

Aroma: Strong bready-toasty malt, with a high caramel and toffee aspect. A wide range of supportive caramelized sugar and toasty bread type aromas are possible (toasted breadcrumbs, ladyfingers, English biscuits, graham crackers, nougat, butterscotch, etc.). Faint hint of roast is sometimes noted. Low to moderate dark or dried fruit esters and alcohol. Very low earthy, floral, orange-citrus, or spicy hops optional.

Appearance: Light copper to dark brown color, often with deep ruby highlights. Clear. Usually has a large tan head, which may not persist. Legs may be evident in stronger versions.

Flavor: Rich, bready-toasty malt that is often full and sweet on the palate with caramel and toffee flavors, but balanced by alcohol and a hint of grainy roast in the finish. The malt often has caramelized sugar and toasty flavors of the same type as described in the aroma. Medium to low alcohol and esters (plums, raisins, dried fruit, etc.). Bitterness low in the balance, giving a sweet to medium-dry finish. Medium-low hop flavor optional, with similar descriptors as the aroma.

Mouthfeel: Medium-full to full-bodied, sometimes with a thick, chewy, sometimes creamy, viscosity. A smooth alcohol warmth is usually present and is desirable since it balances the malty sweetness. Moderate carbonation.

Comments: A range of strengths is allowable; not all versions are very strong. Also known as “Strong Scotch Ale,” the term “wee heavy” means “small strong” and traces to the beer that made the term famous, Fowler’s Wee Heavy, a 12 Guinea Ale. **History:** Descended from Edinburgh Ales, a stronger malty beer brewed in a range of strengths, similar to Burton Ale (although at half the hopping rate). Modern versions have two main variants, a more modest 5% ABV beer and the more widely known 8-9% ABV beer. As gravities decreased over times, some of the variations ceased to be produced.

Characteristic Ingredients: Scottish pale ale malt, a wide range of other ingredients are possible, including adjuncts. Some may use crystal malt or darker grains for color. *No peatsmoked malt.*

Style Comparison: Somewhat similar to an English Barley Wine, but often darker and more caramelly.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.070 – 1.130 IBUs: 17 – 35 FG: 1.018 – 1.040 SRM: 14 – 25 ABV: 6.5 – 10.0%

Commercial Examples: Belhaven Wee Heavy, Broughton Old Jock, McEwan’s Scotch Ale, Orkney Skull Splitter, Traquair House Ale, The Duck-Rabbit Wee Heavy Scotch-Style Ale

Tags: high-strength, amber-color, top-fermented, british-isles, traditional-style, strong-ale-family, malty

17D. English Barley Wine

Overall Impression: A strong and richly malty ale with a pleasant fruity or hoppy depth. A wintertime sipper with a full, chewy body and warming alcohol.

Aroma: Very rich, strongly malty, often with a caramel-like aroma in darker versions or a light toffee character in paler versions. May have a rich character including bready, toasty, or toffee notes. May have moderate to strong fruitiness, often with a dark- or dried-fruit character, particularly in dark versions. The hop aroma may range from mild to assertive, and is typically floral, earthy, tea-like, or marmalade-like. Alcohol may be low to moderate, but are soft and rounded. Aromatic intensity subsides with age, and can develop a quality like sherry, wine, or port.

Appearance: Color ranging from golden amber to dark brown, often with ruby highlights and significant depth of color. Should not be black or opaque. Low to moderate offwhite head. May have low head retention. Brilliant clarity, particularly when aged, although younger versions can have a little haze. High alcohol and viscosity may be visible as legs.

Flavor: Medium to high rich, malty sweetness, often complex and multi-layered, with bread, biscuit, and caramel malt flavors (more toffee-like in paler versions) and having a medium to high fruitiness (often with dark or dried fruit aspects). When aged, these fruity components come out more, and darker versions will have a higher level than paler ones. The hop aroma, flavor, and bitterness can vary wildly. Light to strong hops, with an English character (floral, earthy, tea, or marmalade-like) are common. Bitterness can be light to fairly strong, fading with time, so the balance can be malty to somewhat bitter. Stronger versions will have a little alcohol character. The finish and aftertaste can be moderately dry to moderately sweet, often depending on age. Some oxidative or vinous flavors may be present, and often complex alcohol flavors should be evident. Pale versions typically seem more bitter, better attenuated, and more hopforward than darker versions.

Mouthfeel: Full-bodied and chewy, with a velvety, luscious texture, declining with age. A smooth warmth from aged alcohol should be present, but shouldn't burn. Carbonation may be low to moderate, depending on age and conditioning.

Comments: The richest and strongest of modern English Ales. Their character can change significantly over time; both young and old versions should be appreciated for what they are. The malt profile can vary widely; not all examples will have all possible flavors or aromas. Paler varieties won't have the caramel and richer malt flavors, nor will they typically have the darker dried fruits – don't expect flavors and aromatics that are impossible from a beer of that color. Typically written as "Barley Wine" in the UK, and "Barleywine" in the US.

History: A modern descendent of the strongest Burton Ales. Bass No. 1 was first called a barley wine in 1872. Traditionally a darker beer until Tennant (now Whitbread) first produced Gold Label, a gold-colored version in 1951. The original style that inspired derivative variations in Belgium, the United States, and elsewhere in the world.

Characteristic Ingredients: British pale ale and crystal malts. Limited use of dark malts. Often uses brewing sugars. English hops. British yeast.

Style Comparison: Less hoppy and bitter, maltier and fruitier than American Barleywine. Can overlap Old Ale on the lower end of the range, but without heavier signs of age. Not as caramelly and often not as sweet as a Wee Heavy.

Vital Statistics: OG: 1.080 – 1.120 IBUs: 35 – 70 FG: 1.018 – 1.030 SRM: 8 – 22 ABV: 8.0 – 12.0%

Commercial Examples: Burton Bridge Thomas Sykes Old Ale, Coniston No. 9 Barley Wine, Fuller's Golden Pride, Hogs Back A over T, J.W. Lee's Vintage Harvest Ale, Robinson's Old Tom

Tags: very-high-strength, amber-color, top-fermented, britishisles, traditional-