

## Cask Ale 11/27/07 Bill Batten

Cask ale, once a traditional way of delivering beer to the local pubs of Britain, has become a way for brewers to take their house beers and “spice” them up with the addition of hops and other specialty ingredients, such as oak, chocolate, spices, etc.,

Real ale or living ale is naturally carbonated through the process of dosing flat, bright beer with yeast and sugar and allowing carbonation to naturally occur the same way as a bottle conditioned beer. The only difference from the bottle conditioning is that extra flavor components can be added as well as fining agents such as isinglass, gelatin or Irish moss.

Additions to casks are usually based upon trial and error, too much can greatly impact flavor, masking the great beer that goes into the cask. Also whether you are planning to age the cask needs to be taken into consideration. A stronger beer can improve greatly with age in the cask but the amount of hops or additional ingredients may need to be restrained so as to not overpower the initial flavor components of the beer style in use.

More traditional styles such as milds, browns or porter can be quite enjoyable left as they were originally created. While hopheads out there like to push the envelope and put in as many hops as possible barely leaving enough room for the IPA or Pale Ale to be put into the cask.

Considering the form of hops is up to the brewer, and the equipment used. Flower hops used in casks are standard as they are larger and don't fall apart as a pellet would allowing the beer clear up for a brighter serving presentation. The use of cheese cloth or muslin bags can be used for pellets or smaller additions that may cause problems for serving.

The strength of your beer will determine how long it will take till it is ready to serve. 4% to 9% beers can take 10-12 days whereas stronger 9.5% + beers might take 3 weeks or more of conditioning before the beer is ready to be chilled to allow finings to clear the beer and cause the CO<sub>2</sub> to be absorbed into the beer.

Proper handling of the cask is key. Chilling the beer in its resting position will help everything to stay settled in the belly of the cask. Venting before serving keeps trub and settlement from getting stirred up and keeps the pressure from causing serving issues for the bartender.

Home brewers have the option of creating their own “cask” beers with the use of a corny keg. A corny with a shortened dip tube can work great for this task. Taking a home brew and dosing it with an amount of sugar, such as an amount to be used for bottling with an extra dose of hops or other special ingredients, as mentioned early can become a “cask”. Serving it through a tap with a Co2 push will work but will eventually start taking on the Co2 in the headspace and won't have the same presentation that a hand pump does. Beer engines can be found online or as home brewers tend to do, something can be invented to serve your cask ale. For example, Stan Sisson for a past home-brew festival created a rack to place an unaltered corny upside down, serving beer out of the gas in and venting through the liquid out. If the “cask” isn't going to be served in one sitting consider using a low co2 in to keep the beer fresh for multiple weeks. Although keeping a slight chill on your beer will be an important issue to consider.

Definitions of items:

Firkin – 10.9 us gallon cask

Pin – 5.4 us gallon cask

Shive – fits into the bung on the belly of the cask and has a center spot (tut) for the venting tool, soft or hard spile,

Keystone – fits into bung on the top head of cask

Soft spile – initial venting piece that fits into tut made of softwood or bamboo, allows initial co2 release

Hard spile – still a softwood but with more density, final piece that fits into tut after proper amount of co2 has been vented before serving.

Cradle – puts cask into position that allows sediment to stay in belly and serve the beer brightly until the very end.

Beer engine- for pumping beer, manually operated and typically used to dispense beer from a cask, also can have a sparkler attached to aid with lower carbonated beers.