



Homebrewing – the results are in!

Following on from last month's report on the various methods available to the homebrewer, we take a look at the beers brewed from our IBD office-bound activities. We review each of the beers in terms of their costs, ease of use, flexibility and, most important, drinkability. It was a tough job, but here are the results.



Brewbarrel

Costs: Average price found was around £25.00 per 5-litre mini-keg. This beer was by far the most expensive when costs are taken on a per batch basis. Coming in at £5 per litre, this far exceeds the £1.25 per litre average of the others.



Ease of use: The all-in-one nature of this kit meant that simplicity was at the heart of this kit - the entire process is completed in a self-contained stainless-steel 5L mini-keg. There was no cleaning up required and a simple 10-step process to follow.



Flexibility: The brewing process is coupled with the wide array of options available to order on-line to tailor the recipe and style of beer, making the Brewbarrel an attractive option for those without a technical brewing knowledge.



Drinkability: We took the liberty of making two of the Brewbarrel beers. The first was a Pale Ale which had lemon-grass essence and woodchips added. The aroma, as you could imagine, had strong overtones of lemongrass with a background of whole lemons, grapefruit and oranges. The appearance was a highly carbonated beer with a long-lasting head and a hazy golden colour. The taste was a light sweet body with a light lingering bitterness. The second beer was more similar to our other beers in that it was a dark ale recipe with no extras added. It also was a highly carbonated beer with a long-lasting head. The colour was a rich ruby with clear appearance. The aroma provided light sweet malt notes and a slight caramel undertone. The flavour was short and dry with a very light bitterness levels. The thin body was matched with light malt and grain flavours.

Pale Ale 

Dark Ale 



Braumeister

Costs: Average price for costs of ingredients for a 20-litre brew is around £25.00 when bought as a kit, but considerably lower if bought in bulk. Average cost of equipment: Braumeister, fermenter, pressure barrel and



hydrometer is around £1,260.00. This is by far the most expensive option upfront. However, on a per litre scale the average price of this brew was comparable to the other options coming in at £1.25. A new, slightly cheaper 10-litre version is also now available.



Ease of use: Ultimately this was the most complex of the options. To make this beer required a brewing, fermentation and packaging process. The operation of the Braumeister is straight forward and programmed, the complexity comes in when choosing grains, yeast, hops, timing, temperatures, cleaning, and so on.



Flexibility: The freedom of choice and total control of the entire process is what puts this system above the rest. With the brewer able to select malts and adjuncts, mashing profile, boiling and hopping regimes, as well as downstream fermentation, this system allows the brewer to pretty much brew any beer style (and create their own!).



Drinkability: The best bitter style beer produced from the Braumeister had a delicate hop aroma backed by sweet ester undertones. It had great clarity with a dark golden to light amber appearance. The carbonation was light and head retention good. The flavour was clean and crisp with a light lasting bitterness. The beer was equal to many beers we have had at the local!



Muntons – Woodforde's Wherry

Costs: Average price found was around £25.00 (20L). Average cost of equipment: plastic fermenter, pressure barrel, and hydrometer is around £50.00. The initial upfront cost for the ancillary equipment is higher than the all-in-one systems, however, on a per litre scale the beer is comparable at £1.25.



Ease of use: The process involves an intermediary between the Braumeister and an all-in-one system. The brewing process is completed for you, but you are required to ferment and package the beer. The process was straight-forward and took only a short period of time; using a pressure barrel also saved time rather than washing bottles, sterilising, filling and capping them by hand.



Flexibility: In terms of variability and options, by allowing the homebrewer to undertake and control the fermentation process, variability may be brought in by the choice of different yeasts, fermentation temperatures, dry hopping and so on. There is also a wide range of different brewing kits available from a variety of manufacturers.



Drinkability: The Woodforde's Wherry had a long-lasting head with light carbonation. The colour was a dark golden with light ruby tones and a very slight haze. The aroma had tones of malt, sweetness and esters. The taste was a medium body with a dry finish. The bottom line with this beer was that it was a well fermented (fully attenuated) drinkable beer without any excessive molasses or caramel overtones which has often been typical of many homebrewed beers using liquid malt extract (LME).



Moonshine Drinks

Costs: The average price found was around £25.00 for 20 litres. Ultimately the cheapest per litre and requiring no extra equipment.



Ease of use: By far the simplest option, the only requirement was to add water and pitch yeast. This ease of use does have its limitations on the system though as there is absolutely no freedom of choice to alter the recipe or process.



Flexibility: Very limited with the 'just add water' kit.



Drinkability: The Four Candles Best Bitter had a light carbonation and short head retention alongside a hazy light brown appearance. Alongside very subtle malt undertones the aroma gave off copious amounts of esters in fruity, banana and bubble-gum notes. In the background were phenolic notes of smoke and spice. The taste was a clean light body with a light malt flavour and very light non-lingering bitterness in the background.



Overall:

The traditional impression of 'homebrew' in the past has not been favourable, with flat and undrinkable (but cheap) beers being produced by a small number of enthusiasts. What impressed us most with putting this article together was that all of the beers produced were drinkable and produced at a low cost and with minimal effort. There does, however, appear to be a trade-off between ease-of-use/flexibility and drinkability, with the upfront effort put into the brewing process being repaid with a better beer flavour and drinkability. The Braumeister system, despite its high cost, can be recommended to all brewers who fancy making high-quality beers at home. The just-add-water brewing kits were impressive with their ease-of-use, but the beer taste was not up to that of the more complex Braumeister. The LME kit from Muntons produced very acceptable beer flavour but without the high cost of the Braumeister. The choice is yours... but we can recommend that you give it a go! ■