



# Ale the best in the new year

It promises to be another tough 12 months for pubs but there are plenty of opportunities to increase beer sales in 2013. **Pete Brown** assesses the prospects for licensees

**B**y the time you read this I'll be two weeks into my new year health kick. It's as universal and predictable as Christmas itself – half of us think 'new year, new you', while the other half scornfully point out that diets don't work and detoxes don't really exist.

Whether it ultimately works or not, taking time to reflect and refocus on our priorities is never a bad thing. So what does 2013 hold for the pub?

Well, after last summer's banquet of rain-sodden events, we have no major sporting or public events to drive punters to the pub, unless you count the desperate urge to get away from blanket royal-baby coverage that'll hit some time around June. And it's unlikely that the economic challenges facing pubs and pub-



**Olympic buzz: there will be no major sports events to boost pubs in 2013**

goers will see any dramatic shift. So it's going to be another tough year – maybe there's no other kind of year any more.

But some pubs in 2013 will thrive – some always do.

There are many drivers of success, but one from which any pub could learn is that every single trend comes with a counter-trend.

Here's the most pertinent example: due to a combination of all the punitive factors and changing social trends we're familiar with, people are going to the pub less often. However, many people still love pubs, even though they go less frequently. So when they do visit pubs, they want the experience to be a bit more special and memorable.

People are prepared to spend more on the rarer occasions they go to the pub as long as there is some-



**Celebration time: cask can help make 2013 a good year for pubs**

thing worth spending money on, so where does this special added value come from?

Much of it comes from the extra added value ideas and great service a publican provides, most of which are beyond the scope of *Cask Matters*. But while they're there, they're buying drinks. And they're looking for something more special than what they can find in superstores.

**I**t's unlikely we'll see much, if any, innovation from large commercial brands owned by multi-national brewers to meet this desire. Western Europe is a basket case in the eyes of these guys, a margins game with forever diminishing returns. All the best talent within their organisations is being sent to the so-called BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China) where beer volumes are growing and there's still profit to play for. Where there is any interest at all in the UK, it's in the off-trade.

Within lager there's world beer, and publicans would do well to ensure they offer something worthwhile in this sector. But the term is already much debased by brands seeking to pass themselves off as world beers when they are no different in provenance and character from mainstream lagers.

No, the real news and interest will, of course, come from the cask-ale market and the emerging 'craft-beer' sector.

Craft beer is, once again, a subject for elsewhere. And again, you ►

## Case study: the Baum, Rochdale, Greater Manchester

**Growing a cask business**

The Baum at Rochdale, Greater Manchester, made it to last year's national final of CAMRA's (the Campaign for

Real Ale's) Pub of the Year, and was named Greater Manchester's Regional Pub of the Year.

Licensees Simon and Heidi Crompton explain the secret of their success and how working with their customers, forward planning, and holding events all play their part in driving the business forward.

Simon says: "Our business has been built on one key idea – constant improvement. We've always worked hard to listen to, and encourage, our drinkers and ask them to tell us what they like. "When we started, we had

three handpulls. Over time, and with the encouragement of our regular drinkers, we extended it to five – and now eight – handpulls, all fully deployed all week. Our



**Customer focus: Simon and Heidi Crompton, licensees at the Baum**

offer is quality food with real ale and speciality bottled beers. "Getting the range right takes some research and planning and I enlist the help of one of my



**Cask force: a cask-ale taster rack at the Rochdale outlet**

regulars, who I call my cask-ale guru. We've also introduced service initiatives like cask racks with one-third pint glass serves to provide more of an experience for those who like to try something different."

Heidi adds: "We also have a very full events calendar with themed menu nights planned for Burns' Night in January, Valentine's Day in February and Mothers' Day in March. When there aren't events to plan we try to create our own."

"We also throw open our doors on weeknights, with our events room booked for everything from local CAMRA and round-table meetings to a poetry club and even a boules league. We pride ourselves on the buzz that we create in the local community."

## ASK ABOUT CASK

**Q. How long should cask ale be on sale for?**

**A.** Ideally, you should aim to sell each container of cask within three days from the point you start dispensing the beer in the cask to the bar. This is because

every time you draw a pint out of the container, it is replaced with air. The more air there is in the container, the more the beer is prone to oxidation, which can cause the beer to 'turn' and taste acetic.

The three days does not include the time it takes to condition a cask and get it ready for sale. Ensure the container is 'hard pegged' at the end of each trading session to keep the condition in.

■ **TOP TIP:** Use 'day dots' from

your kitchen to indicate when a cask should be sold by, or chalk a use-by date on the container.

**Q. How can I minimise wastage at the end of a cask?**

**A.** Auto tilts are proven to get the most beer out of each container in the best possible condition. Ensure the auto tilts are level, the springs or pistons are included in the weekly deep-clean of the cellar, and that the correct setting is used for 9s and 18s. If manually tilting, tilt the container when two-thirds full and make sure the back of the container is raised no more than three to four inches higher than the front. Over-tilting can result in sediment falling forward on to the tap.

Email your questions to [caskmatters@wrmb.com](mailto:caskmatters@wrmb.com)  
Answers supplied by Cask Marque



**Cellar checks: make sure your beer is ready for sale**



**Quality control: giving ale the once-over**



**Cask Comment**  
**James Staughton**



**Invest time in cask beer and reap the benefits**

**M**ake 2013 the year of cask beer. With an ever-growing number of cask-beer drinkers, and its unique nature making it one of the only drinking experiences that can't be replicated at home, 2013 is the perfect year for licensees to invest time in cask.

Hand-crafted, traditional cask beer is enjoying a revival, helped by drinkers' interest in the origins and provenance of beers. A recent survey of the Independent Family Brewers of Britain's 29 members revealed that, while overall beer sales are falling, our cask volumes grew by 2% in 2012.

For pubs, the key to a successful cask business lies in stocking the optimum number and styles of cask beer, keeping them well, and promoting them effectively to encourage existing customers to drink more and bring new drinkers into the category. Most cask-beer drinkers feel at home with known brands but also like to see something a bit different and/or local.

Family brewers alone now offer an expansive choice of 517 brands of core and seasonal beers, so consumer choice is at an all-time high.

Nevertheless, Cask Marque research shows that 34% of customers would not return to a pub if the quality of the pint

served was poor. Cellar management training is therefore key to improving quality and helping to drive sales.

The Cask Marque Award in Beer and Cellar Quality is a BII (British Institute of Innkeeping)-accredited training course and is designed to help improve yields (by up to 7%), increase sales (3%) and decrease wastage.

As family brewers own 4,100 of the best pubs in the UK, it's important to ensure that our beers are always served in the best possible condition. We invest in our cellars, equipment and especially training and show, by example, how other pub operators can make the most out of cask.

There's no point having cask go to waste, so offer tastings to encourage customers to try new brands and urge them to buy.

Further effort also needs to be made to widen the market reach of cask beer, including moves to overcome women's aversion to pint glasses with new stemmed styles that mimic wine glasses or goblets.

Cask beer is found only in the British pub, which makes it vital to the future of the industry. For that reason alone, make 2013 your year of cask beer.

**James Staughton is chairman of the Independent Family Brewers of Britain and managing director of St Austell Brewery**



**Back to the roots: drinkers are interested in beers' provenance**



**Keep it fresh: don't get complacent when it comes to your cask-ale range**

shouldn't ignore it. But cask ale is both a vital part of, and much bigger than, craft beer.

We've written in great detail over the past five years about the trends driving the cask revival, and there is no reason to think those trends will suddenly reverse this year.

So January is the perfect time to look ahead and think about how to best take advantage of the most dynamic sector of the beer market. During the day-to-day grind, it's very easy to be reactive and pragmatic when it comes to what ales go on the bar – you slip into a routine, a brewer collects some casks and drops off a few more, and you're still selling good volumes of beer. No-one is complaining.

**L**ooking forward, you could extend your cask business to a much broader range of people, more often. We've spoken a great deal about the optimal cask-ale range in the past year or so. We've made the point that a good selection should include both familiar and unfamiliar beers, probably from a mix of small, local breweries and bigger regional or national players.

But other variations in your range actually make much more of an impact: namely, style and strength. It's important to have a mix of light, sessionable beers with something more substantial.

And one of the main drivers of cask's popularity is the sheer array and variety of styles now available, from golden ales through best bitter to porter, stout, IPA, barley wine and

**Looking forward, you could extend your cask business to a much broader range of people**

old ale, and the growing number of speciality beers brewed with curious ingredients or ageing processes.

A bar that stocks four or five brown bitters, all between 3.8% ABV and 4.1% ABV, is simply narrowing the range of potential interest and sales in cask.

The fourth important dynamic of ranging after familiarity, style and strength is how the range evolves over time.

Over the past eight months *Cask Matters* has highlighted topical, seasonal and event-driven strategies for promoting cask ale. Its infinite variety makes it relevant at all times of year and during all occasions.

Past articles are available online for download, and together form the basis of a calendar that helps provide both stocking and promotional ideas for the year ahead.

Of course, there should be some fixed points in your range – old favourites and standards – but cask can bring new ones to the bar on a continuous basis like no other drink can.

Beyond that, will there be any

notable new trends in cask this year?

Larger regional brewers will continue to take inspiration from micro-brewers and extend their limited edition and seasonal portfolios to complement familiar brands, exploring styles and variations such as different individual hop varieties. The number of new breweries will continue to expand, and emerging stars in the microbrewery sector will become more established and develop national fame.

New styles will continue to grow, and the big talking point of 2013 in beer-style circles will be wild or sour beers, using spontaneous fermentation or Belgian-style *Brettanomyces* yeasts, and foraged ingredients. These beers certainly won't be to everyone's taste, but they will push boundaries and notions of cask further than ever before.

**B**ut for me, the biggest news of 2013 will be cask's local appeal taken to its logical conclusion: the re-emergence of the brewpub. The most exciting pub openings of 2012 have had micro-breweries on the premises, and there are many more in the pipeline.

The appeal of the brewpub is broader than you might think: for those who actively seek out local breweries, it's perfect. But they also appeal to more novice drinkers too. Beer brewed on the premises is a novel idea and if you trust the landlord, you're likely to at least give his beer a go.

If that sounds like a trend suitable only for freehouses, I don't think that's the case. Various small brew-

**How to... master the perfect serve**

Pouring cask ale correctly is vital to ensure the drink's quality. A short staff training session can make all the difference to the presentation of the product. Always use a clean, cold glass every time.

If using long spouts (bottom-fill swan necks) with a sparkler, hold the glass upright and place the sparkler on the base of the glass. Create the head with the first pull of the handpull, and keep the sparkler at the base of the glass throughout the entire pour. If the beer is very lively and the head quite large, slow down the pull of the handpull. If the head is small, teach staff to pull the handpull more vigorously.

Use your eyes and judge how much head has been created with the first pull. When the beer reaches the brim of the glass, drop

the glass away from the spout.

If using short spouts (top-fill swan necks) without a sparkler, hold the glass at a 45° angle and pour the beer down the side of the glass, straightening the glass as the beer reaches the brim. Make sure the spout does not go into the beer.

It is a legal requirement that no more than 5% head is served in a 20oz pint glass – but if a customer asks for the glass to be topped up, you have a legal requirement to do so.

Get staff to take some e-learning training. CPL offers a great training course for new and existing staff called the Bar Excellence Award, which helps staff provide that perfect serve of every category of drink. Visit [cpl-elearning/barexcellence.co.uk](http://cpl-elearning/barexcellence.co.uk) for further details.



**Get it right: make sure your pouring procedure is correct**

**Cask Matters**

**Previous editions of Cask Matters can be downloaded at [www.caskmatters.co.uk](http://www.caskmatters.co.uk)**

Topics include:

- Running a beer festival.
- Stocking champion beers.
- Linking beer with special events.
- Making the most of Cask Ale Week.

**Next month's Cask Matters will focus on making your cask offer more attractive to women customers**

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