



Judges put the entries through their paces

## Accolade for cidermakers

A panel of experts have picked their way through a huge array of cider from across the globe to award trophies to those that stood out from their peers in taste and quality. Nicola Collenette reports

The second International Cider Challenge, organised by Off Licence News, saw more entries this year from all over the globe.

Ciders came from far and wide, including South Africa, France, Belgium, Australia, Canada, the Czech Republic and the UK.

Two overseas ciders scooped the top trophy-winning spots this year (see box). Two gold medals, 10 silvers and 23 bronzes were handed out in total.

An expert panel of judges blind-tasted the entries and assessed the ciders' taste, appearance and aroma.

Sainsbury's beer and cider buyer Oliver Chadwyck-Healey said: "I was very surprised and impressed by the ice ciders. It's an unknown category for me but one that I will certainly be looking out for in future."

"The standard of ciders was very high.

While there were a handful of disappointments they were outweighed by some very impressive examples and those worthy of medals really stood out. It was great to taste and discuss the ciders with some very knowledgeable people.

"In a market where so many ciders are on offer, any guide to quality from an expert and independent body is very important as a steer for those who may be looking to try something new. Winning a medal is a great honour and recognition of the hard work that goes into every bottle."

Gabe Cook, corporate relations executive at Bulmers, said: "The competition is extremely high in value - it gives an opportunity to test new products and to give publicity as well as confirming the quality of the product." He warned producers that they needed to pay careful attention to which category they entered their ciders into.

**Winning a medal is a great honour and recognition of all the hard work**

"Be sure to enter ciders into the correct category. There were too many dry ciders in the medium category," he said.

Simon Reed, producer of Rough Old Wife Cider, also had some advice for cidermakers. He said: "Please spend more time tasting your own ciders and get customers to blind-taste as well. With unanimous low scores on certain ciders across all the judges, fundamental errors were very evident."

But he added: "I was impressed that the

range does reflect the variation in ciders present in both the commercial mainstream and artisan worlds - each is obviously learning something from the other."

National Association of Cider Makers consultant Nick Bradstock said: "Some ciders have disappointed in that flavour defects persist even though fruit quality was probably good. But there were some excellent products that clearly showed that great care and attention had been given to re-establishing traditional skills and adapting of other techniques."

Publisher of drinkbritain.com Susanna Forbes said she would have liked to see more single varietal ciders and more perries being entered. "I had been expecting a higher standard in many areas. I think we were fair, but I know from travelling the country there are more good ciders out there," she said.

### The judges



**Simon Russell**  
chairman of judges, spokesman for the National Association of Cider Makers



**Nick Bradstock**  
consultant to the National Association of Cider Makers and former cidemaker



**Oliver Chadwyck-Healey**  
Sainsbury's beer and cider buyer



**Simon Reed**  
producer of Rough Old Wife Cider



**Gabe Cook**  
corporate relations executive at Bulmers and small-scale cidemaker



**Susanna Forbes**  
publisher of drinkbritain.com



**Nicola Collenette**  
features editor of OLN

## International Cider Challenge 2011 results

<b>Perry/Pear Cider</b>		
<b>Bulmers Pear Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Strongbow Summer Pear Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Westons English Vintage Perry</b>	Westons	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Press 81 Pear</b>	Aston Manor	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Medium Cider</b>		
<b>Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Vintage 2010</b>	Thatchers Cider	<b>Gold</b>
<b>Cidre Le Brun Medium</b>	Cidre Bigoud	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Malvern Gold</b>	Aston Manor	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Mercury Draught Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Press 81 Apple</b>	Aston Manor	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Mad Apple</b>	Mad Apple	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Gaymer's Stewley</b>	Magners GB	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Gaymer's Newtons Vale</b>	Magners GB	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Gaymer's Somerset</b>	Magners GB	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Merrydown Medium Cider</b>	Merrydown	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Aspall Draught Suffolk Cyder</b>	Aspall	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Hazerdine Orchard Herefordshire Vintage Cider</b>	Brands Direct	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Sheppy's Oak Matured Vintage Cider</b>	Sheppy's Cider	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Henry Weston Vintage</b>	Westons	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Dry Cider</b>		
<b>Cidre Le Brun Dry</b>	Cidre Bigoud	<b>Gold</b>
<b>County Premium Cider</b>	The County Cider Company	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Sainsbury's Taste the Difference French Sparkling Cidre</b>	Les Celliers Associés	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Malvern Oak</b>	Aston Manor	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Churchwards Original</b>	Lidl UK	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Strongbow Clear Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Woodgate</b>	Lidl UK	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>English Vintage Cider</b>	Westons	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Merrydown Dry Cider</b>	Merrydown	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Aspall Dry Export</b>	Aspall	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Aspall Premier Cru</b>	Aspall	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Symonds Founder's Reserve</b>	Jygsaw Brands	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Single Variety</b>		
<b>Sheppy's Dabinett Apple Cider</b>	Sheppy's Cider	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Sweet</b>		
<b>Cidre Le Brun Sweet</b>	Cidre Bigoud	<b>Trophy</b>
<b>Organic, Fruit Cider &amp; Speciality</b>		
<b>Neige Récolte d'Hiver Ice Cider</b>	La Face Cachée de la Pomme	<b>Trophy</b>
<b>Neige Première Ice Cider</b>	La Face Cachée de la Pomme	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Domaine Pinnacle Ice Cider Still</b>	Camus Cognac	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Domaine Pinnacle Ice Cider Sparkling</b>	Camus Cognac	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Aspall Perronelle's Blush</b>	Aspall	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Design &amp; Packaging</b>		
<b>Aspall Organic Suffolk Cyder</b>	Aspall	<b>Gold</b>
<b>Symonds Founder's Reserve</b>	Jygsaw Brands	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Sheppy's Oak Matured Vintage Cider</b>	Sheppy's Cider	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Orchard Pig</b>	Orchard Pig	<b>Silver</b>
<b>Strongbow Summer Pear Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Strongbow Original Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Strongbow Clear Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Bronze</b>
<b>Mercury Draught Cider</b>	Carlton & United Breweries	<b>Bronze</b>

## Trophy winners

There were two trophies awarded this year to the outstanding sweet cider Cidre Artisanal Le Brun from France, and the lip-smackingly good Neige Récolte d'Hiver Ice Cider, from Canada.

Cidre Bigoud, which is better known as Cidre Le Brun, was founded in 1955, and started as a family business. Today the company is led by Dominique Le Brun, son of the original founder Jean Le Brun, and it is still a family-run business. Cidre Le Brun prides itself on its carefully tended orchards in Brittany. The company's Valérie Elias says: "Only the best quality apples are hand-picked and stored in wooden crates for approximately three weeks, to allow the fruit to release its aromas. The apples are crushed and stored in a tank to enhance their taste quality before being pressed to obtain the juice. The process of fermentation is then allowed to take place naturally before the cider is bottled, using traditional natural cork. None of our products are pasteurised, which guarantees the best cider for all worldwide connoisseurs."

"We are proud and delighted we have been awarded this trophy, which reflects the quality and excellence of our cider."

La Face Cachée de la Pomme, which produces Neige Récolte d'Hiver Ice Cider, was set up by film producer François Pouliot. In 1994 he bought an orchard in Hemmingford, Quebec, and began to develop ice ciders. Co-owner and artist Stéphanie Beaudoin says: "In 2007, the Fundación de la Sidra in Spain recognised us for our contribution to the development of ice cider and for introducing it to the market in Quebec and the rest of the world. The family estate has received more than 80 international awards."

The cider is distributed in the UK via Cellar Trends, with an rrp of around £50. It is available at Harrods, Paxton & Whitfield and C'est Si Bon.



## Russell: greater representation from artisanal producers needed

"I was delighted to be a judge at the inaugural International Cider Challenge last year and again delighted and perhaps surprised to be invited back this year, this time as chair of judges.

"We had an impressive line-up of judges and I thank them for their expertise, patience and good humour. Seventy-odd ciders – and some were odd – over about four hours is a daunting prospect, but in the company of my fellow judges it was great fun.

"As to the standard of entries, it was generally very high. Those with technical faults really stood out, with the cider-makers on the panel able to identify the likely causes of rogue flavours.

There were also some real gems – excellent examples of the breadth of different styles possible with cider and perry.

"The competition has, to date, attracted fewer entries from small and artisanal producers and if we can address that we might get an even greater range of

interesting ciders, even if the consistency of product might then be more variable.

"Thanks to the organisers for first conceiving the idea and then delivering an excellent event. I have no doubt that the International Cider Challenge will continue to go from strength to strength."

**Simon Russell**  
chairman of ICC judges



At least 70 ciders were tasted before the winners were picked