

VSMC: Tasting, March 20, 2011

Your scribe for these tasting notes and commentary, Rhys Jones

We had the pleasure of tasting two drams this evening.

Auchentoshan 18 year old, 43% abv...

Auchentoshan is less popular than it deserves. Generally, it's a lighter, smooth malt whiskey, more accessible for those starting into the malt whiskey experience. It's also typically lighter and more refreshing for those experienced with malts, who want a lighter fruity malt for more casual sipping, or on days when a heavier, more robust malt is too rich for their mood.

For those unfamiliar with this distillery's dependably fine quality malt, reasonably-close comparisons may be Glen Grant, Aberfeldy, Arran, Glenfiddich 12 and Cardhu.

As a malt whiskey, it could get lost in cocktails, thus easily-replace Canadian, Irish and American whiskies as the base.

One of three distilleries producing in the Lowlands region, it is unique for continuing the true *triple distillation* method of producing its' new make. This triple distillation originally was to lighten the historically-heavy flavours Scottish malts were known for, and make it more competitive with the popular Irish whiskies of the day.

Now part of the Morrison Bowmore group, it is notable as one of three very different Scottish malt flavour profiles under that umbrella. Morrison Bowmore is owned by Suntory Group, a noted Japanese beverage firm.

Many club members are familiar with the 10 and 12 year old, as well as the Three Wood. This familiarity had an impact on commentary and scoring.

I have personally tasted and enjoyed the four easily-available bottlings, as well as three single-cask bottlings, and was looking forward to this edition.

Observation:

Fine gold colour, quite rich for what nosed like a second-fill bourbon cask over 18 years. The ring was well-defined and held, while the legs were of good structure. Both held the colour very well.

Nose:

Initially tree fruits and field berries slipped in behind a nice lighter malt. Toffee/cream soda notes followed comments of noticeable light oakiness, again followed by almond, honey, walnut oil, and light citrus notes, grassiness with light spices.

On dilution, added comments were melon, brown sugar, mossiness, a hint of damp dog and a diesel note in the background.

Palette:

Initial fruity malt from the nose made for high hopes, but while a variety of fruity essences were noted, strawberry, banana, melon, they quickly tired. A pale shadow of the nose. Other notes were black pepper, licorice, slight petrol, a light oakiness noticeable but not grabbing the edge of your tongue.

Finish:

As it faded fairly quickly, to fairly-long vanilla, buttery and mild oaky notes, a sudden burst of sherry was noted by a couple members, which seemed to persist. This was a late comment, indicating time in the glass may slightly enrich what most agreed was a disappointing finish to a fairly good light nose.

Development: (Auchentoshan)

Oil notes developed, the sherry note persisted, the mild oakiness became more prevalent.

Member comments were consistent: Average and underwhelming. Your scribe will say, this cask seemed to tire remarkably soon, and would have been best served some years earlier. I and others would more highly recommend the available and affordable 10 & 12 year old expressions. I have thoroughly-enjoyed single cask bottlings of Auchentoshan older and younger than this vatting and can say without reservation, this doesn't compare. An enjoyable, unremarkable single malt whiskey.

Club Score: 75.6

Our second tasting was the well-known West Highland, a member of the original Diageo Classic Malts, ***Oban 14 year old, also 43% abv.***

Oban may not have gained renown were it not for the Classic series from Diageo, which increased public awareness of Scottish malt flavours generally, as well as made them more readily available in a more consistent format... Marketing rules, Oban and malt fans benefited.

With a palette all its' own, similars could be: Aberlour 10, Speyside, Glen Ord, Glendronach, Pulteney, Springbank, Balvenie Double Cask 12, Scapa.

A small coastal distillery, Oban ages their namesake for 14 years using a variety of casks with a percentage of what seem to have originated as dry sherry casks.

Observation:

Brassy gold, with a slight red tinge around the ring and legs, both average but good.

Nose:

Having worked ranches for a while, all agreed, it's tighter than a cow's bum in tick season. This needed serious time in hand to warm and open it's initial sharp, peppery alcohol hit, to many fine tones of Seville orange marmalade, sea breeze, furniture wax and spiciness.

Evident were malt, currents, aromatic pipe tobacco, light peat, nutmeg, cloves, eucalyptus, light dry sherry, white pepper, toffee, salt. Some found a slightly sour, butyric note. Most common was white pepper & bitter-sweet orange/flamed orange zest. Diluted was consistent, adding cane sugar.

Palette:

Seville orange/lemon marmalade was prevalent, with butter, clove/cinnamon spiciness. Eucalyptus/fennel/licorice, light peat, dried apricot, briny, wet dog was mentioned, again aromatic pipe tobacco.

Finish:

Dark chocolate followed a lingering bitter-sweet orange citrus and spicy finish with vanilla/toffee notes. Medium long and very satisfying, unfolding variety of pleasant flavours.

Development:

Legible notes: long time to initially open then consistent from start to finish, kept unfolding as long as it was in the glass.

Comments:

Generally: It shifts & changes with every sip once it warmed to the task. All said, one to nose, sip & nibble on all night long.

Club Score: 83