



BARS CAUGHT POURING WELL LIQUOR INTO CALL

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EYNSFORD, England -- Armed with a battered black briefcase and a thirst for justice, Richard Strawson marches up to the front door of the Gamecock pub in southwest England, ready for his next score.

Mr. Strawson, a West Kent trading-standards officer, is on a raid to catch pub owners and bartenders committing one of the oldest crimes on the books: substituting cheap booze for the good stuff. Unlike previous booze busters, Mr. Strawson has a powerful weapon at his disposal -- a tiny cardboard dipstick that acts as a litmus paper for high-end alcohol. "Let's see if they're serving what they say they are," he says, as he flashes his badge at J.R. Newman, the pub's manager, and walks behind the bar.

Police have been cracking down on counterfeit spirits for centuries. Even in Glasgow, Scotland, an 1872 police raid found only two pubs in 30 serving real Scotch whisky. Today, according to a spirits-industry study, as many as one in 12 U.K. pubs is pouring bogus booze out of brand-name bottles -- depriving consumers of the high-end products they request by name and spirits makers of highly profitable sales.

Proving the alcohol has been substituted -- or "tipped," as the practice is known in Britain -- hasn't been easy. In the past, samples of suspect spirits were transported back to spirit companies' labs for testing.

Now, major companies including Diageo PLC, its just-acquired Seagram Co. unit and Allied Domecq PLC, have together devised a way to spot-check some of the premium spirits brands served in British pubs. They have begun adding a distinctive chemical "marker" -- a basic sugar, odorless, tasteless and colorless -- to the European production of some of their brands. When present in a drink, the chemical marker will cause a corresponding cardboard dipstick to change color.

Diageo began adding a marker to Smirnoff vodka in 1998 and to Gordon's gin in 2000. Bacardi & Co. Ltd. began adding a marker to Bacardi rum last year, and markers for other pricey labels are in the works.

Liquor companies are distributing dipsticks, packed in tubes with the corresponding brand's label, to local British enforcement authorities. "These dipsticks are a cheap and cheerful test for counterfeiting," says Philip Scatchard, U.K. director of the International Federation of Spirits Providers, the industry group that started the testing program and coordinates anticounterfeiting efforts. Founded in 1999, the federation provides dipsticks to local standards-enforcement authorities, who conduct the tests and pursue violators.

"If I'm taking money from a customer's purse every day, and she doesn't notice it, it's still theft, isn't it?"

Drinkers in the U.K. are spending \$31.9 million a year for counterfeit booze, according to industry estimates. Complaints about "tipping" rarely come from consumers, who aren't likely to notice a difference in taste, but that doesn't deter investigators. "If I'm taking money from a customer's purse every day, and she doesn't notice it, it's still theft, isn't it?" says Graham Hebblethwaite, divisional manager at the West Yorkshire trading standards office.

On a recent afternoon, Robert Unwin, of the West Yorkshire office, walked into the Prince Arthur pub in Bradford and ordered himself a Gordon's gin and a Smirnoff vodka, neat. Instead of knocking back his two shots, Mr. Unwin reached into his bag, pulled out two white dipsticks and dipped one into each drink.

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Behind the bar, David Welsh, the pub's manager, nervously asked what he was doing, Mr. Unwin recalls. "Oh, just a routine check of your spirits," Mr. Unwin says he cheerily replied, as he waited for a yellow patch on the dipsticks to change green. The test strips didn't change color, but Mr. Welsh did, Mr. Unwin says. In court several weeks later, Mr. Welsh was found guilty of selling counterfeit Gordon's and Smirnoff and fined \$1,450. Mr. Welsh didn't return calls seeking comment.

To publicize the cases, Mr. Scatchard distributes a "rogues gallery" of offenders. Some pub owners have seen their stories plastered on the front of local newspapers in "name and shame" campaigns. Joseph McGuinness, a pub manager from Manchester, says he saw business drop off after local papers printed his picture and a news story about his guilty plea to serving mislabeled Smirnoff and Bacardi in his pub (he says he isn't sure how it got there).

William Hart, a pub manager in West Yorkshire, left the Imperial pub after he was convicted in connection with counterfeit booze, only to move to a new job less than a mile down the road at the Cedric Taps pub. Mr. Hart paid his fine but says he thought the rum he was serving was legitimate; he'd won it in a darts contest. "I certainly wasn't intending to cheat anyone, and it won't be a problem again," he says.

Dipstick-testing isn't widely used outside the U.K. In some countries, such as Spain and France, legal restraints on what kind of evidence can be used in court make dipsticks unfeasible. U.S. spokesmen for Allied Domecq, Diageo and Seagram say they don't regard tipping as a major threat. Still, in Las Vegas, the Nevada state attorney general is encouraging police to run sting operations in certain casinos and bars. The Las Vegas investigators look through bookkeeping records to see whether orders from brand-name distributors had dropped while sales of the drinks remain steady. Kimberly Rushton, the state's chief deputy attorney general, says, "I love the dipstick idea. I think it would be very helpful to our enforcement efforts."

Meanwhile, scientists at the drink companies -- especially Diageo, maker of Johnnie Walker and J&B -- are trying to crack the code for creating a dipstick test for Scotch whisky. So far, they haven't found a way to add a marker without violating the U.K.'s Scotch Whisky Act, which closely regulates how the drink is made. (In addition to being made in Scotland, no additives are allowed.)

Back at the Gamecock pub, Mr. Strawson's dipstick tests have uncovered no sign of substituted booze. That may be why few of the customers seem worried about the threat of inferior booze. "As long as it works," quips a 33-year-old construction worker, David Francis, from the end of the bar.

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By Glen Edwards (glen_edwards@mybc.com)

Taken from **Beerfly**, a great weekly column on beer at www2.mybc.com/food/columns/display.cfm?catid=28

Brewers are frustrated that some bars aren't coming clean over how they serve draught.

Unhygienic serving methods have long been the bane of beermakers. At best, dirty delivery of draught can ruin the complex taste of a good beer or, at worst, make you feel like you've ingested tap water from a cheap Mexican motel.

Indifferent serving establishments are a particular sore spot for beer experts who consider keg-to-glass the purest method of tapping into the brewer's best taste intentions. Some breweries, like Vancouver Island gem Lighthouse Brewing and Vancouver's premium Storm Brewing, don't even offer their precious recipes by the bottle.

**"Beer is like milk...
draught lines must be clean"**

Keith Lemcke, executive editor of the Draught Beer Guild and marketing manager of the World Brewing Academy, recently wrote to Beerfly expressing his concern over the number of bars spoiling the beer experience.

"You would be quite surprised to know that an obscenely high percentage of draught beer served is compromised in some fashion, rendering it substantially changed from the way the brewer had intended it be served," states Lemcke.

Wolfgang Hoess, brewmaster for Vancouver Island Brewery, is in full agreement. "From what I have observed and tasted there definitely needs to be a lot done to make the draught beers more appealing, pleasing and better tasting. Unfortunately, the brewery itself doesn't really have any control over it — it's the licensee," says Hoess.

Generally, brewers recommend that, every two weeks, draught lines are flushed out and all hardware and faucets are hand-cleaned. Weekly line cleaning is essential, however, in licensed places where the beer does not flow as freely — low-volume establishments where beer may be left stuck wallowing in the works, incubating all sorts of grubby germs.

"You're dealing with beer, and beer is like milk," relates Stefan Tobler, brewmaster for Okanagan Spring Brewery. "It's susceptible to microbiological (bacterial) growth, so you have to keep draught lines as clean as possible."

For those patrons looking to bypass the road to bad beer experiences, here are a few tell-tale warning signs ...

A muddled mug — whether smeared with oils, lipstick, dirt or residuals from a previous beer — is one of the top pet peeves of brewmasters.

"It's the most common (problem)," says Bill White, brewmaster for Oland Specialty Beer Co. "Dirty glasses ruin any beverage you put into them. You smell the cleaner from the dishwasher. You see spots all over them. If you pour in a beer and you got bubbles on the side you know you're drinking from a dirty glass. It kills the foam and it takes much of the enjoyable things away."

Watch out for bartenders who habitually dip the tap into the beer while pouring a glass.

As the drink orders pile up, the spout will soon carry the history of a night's pouring. For that reason, the faucet should never even touch the glass, let alone be immersed in the beer.

"Putting the glass in the spout while the beer is being pushed up (should be avoided)," says Lynda Askew, manager of Oland's instructional Beer Institute. "That tap is going into someone's beer. Through the course of an evening there's quite a build-up of crud and bacteria."

Beer folk also encourage bars to take the bumper rings off the faucet mouth. These rubber parts harbour bacteria, invite fruit flies and degrade the outer surface of the faucet, creating pits in the brass where bacteria can lodge. If the faucet mouth is dipped in the beer, oils that collect on the outer surface — from the bar and restaurant atmosphere — will immediately begin to break down the foam.

"Next time you are at a bar that has rubber bumpers around the mouths of their faucets," Lemcke warns, "Look closely under the bumpers at the stuff that has accumulated. It can be pretty nasty."

If you have a draught beer that smells slightly like butter or butterscotch, chances are the establishment's beer line contains an infection. "Such an infection will not make you sick," writes Lemcke, "but it does indicate a real hygiene problem."

"If I'm ever served a beer that doesn't have a (proper) foam head on it, generally speaking I'll send it back," says Askew

**Using air compressors to push beer "is
as bad an idea as anyone ever had"**

According to Lemcke, many draught system installers build systems to run under a mixture of nitrogen and CO2 gas, commonly known as Guinness gas or the trade name Aligal.

Unless each line has been individually engineered to work with the right pressure of that gas, the beer ends up de-carbonated in just a few days. Small changes in carbonation affect the aroma, flavour, foam-creation, and "mouth-feel" of any beer. Some bars even use air compressors to push beer through their lines, which "is as bad an idea as anyone ever had."

Inside This Issue:

Bars caught passing off well liquor as call"

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Are You Serving Bad Draft?

Did you know that you should have your beer lines cleaned MORE often if your draft volume is low?

*Read more on **page three** where you will find Glen Edwards feature from Beerfly clearing up a lot of misconceptions about serving good draft beer.*



505 Consumers Road, Suite 510,
Toronto, ON Canada M2J 4V6

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