

# Feeling Hopless

Beer for those of us who hate bitterness *By Kelly Kenoyer*

I had my first sip of beer around the age of 14. I curiously asked my dad for a taste of his IPA. He raised an eyebrow, handed me the bottle, and I cautiously took a sip.

The bitter hoppiness of it deterred me from beer, and alcohol itself, for a few more years.

In college I gave beer another try, but the crappy canned

Keystone Lights didn't do much for me either. Why did beer either taste like piss-water or spinach?

Of course, hops are one of the four key ingredients in beer, the others being malt, water and yeast. Without all hops, beer would be some other, much more pointless drink. I'm not talking about all hops, but about the bitter flavors that hops can induce in beer, often categorized as

"hoppiness."

It took me until my 20s to realize that there was a whole world of beer that was flavorful and affecting without being pointlessly bitter. I still get teased occasionally about my distaste for that bitter flavor by my masochistic hipster friends who love to drink liquid suffering, but I've found that there's plenty of quality suds in the region if you look hard enough.

Now the first thing I look for on drink menus is a little number dictating IBU — international bittering units. I try to avoid drinking anything over 40 IBU for the sake of my sanity.

If you're looking for un-bitter beer in the perilous Pacific Northwest, let me be your guide.

## Oakshire Baltic Porter, 35 IBU, 7.8 percent alcohol by volume (ABV), Eugene

This porter isn't your typical porter. Though I liked it quite a bit, several other tasters disagreed entirely. It's creamy, with a bittersweet finish that might make you question your position on hops. It's surprisingly light and smoky for a porter, and makes for good summer drinking.

## pFriem Pilsner, 38 IBU, 4.9 percent ABV, Hood River

The pFriem Pilsner came recommended by a number of beer lovers, but I found it underwhelming. Though it's very drinkable, it's nothing special. I would compare it to a Heineken or a Corona, though it has a handsome German-inspired label. For your money, you can find better flavor in an ale or Kölsch.

## Claim 52 Kölsch, 15 IBU, 5.2 percent ABV, Eugene

This Kölsch is a crowd pleaser — the perfect thing to bring to a barbeque or hangout by the river. This German-style pale ale is cheap for a micro-brew but doesn't taste cheap. It's a perfectly balanced light-colored beer for any occasion.

## Rogue Hazelnut Brown Nectar, 33 IBU, 5.6 percent ABV, Ashland

This brown is one of my favorite beers of all time. Smooth and malty with an aroma of hazelnut, it's light for a brown and makes for the perfect tallboy to bring to a party. There's a delicate, authentic aftertaste of hazelnut, and the creamy flavor makes this feel like the perfect beer companion to a rainy day and a novel.

## Sam Bond's Filbert Brown Ale, 23 IBU, 4.9 percent ABV, Eugene

Another hazelnut flavored brown, this one has a nice chocolate-y flavor with spiced notes. I thought I got a whiff of cloves or nutmeg, but it's hard to say. This one isn't as balanced as the Rogue brown — it's a little heavy on the caramel flavors and might be trying just a bit too hard. But I'd certainly drink it on tap at any bar if I were feeling up to something hip and trendy.

If none of these tasty taps are available at your bar, here are some tips on how to avoid the bitterest of brews:

- Check the IBU if it's available. This is a great marker that more bars and breweries should publicize. Stay under 40 or 50 IBU if hoppy isn't your thing.

- Ales, hefeweizens, saisons and lagers are generally pretty trustworthy, though ales often lack other exciting flavors. Generally if the word "cream" is in the name of the beer, it's not too bitter.

- Don't be afraid to try browns, stouts, reds and sours! These are often more flavorful than the lighter beers listed above, and sours have fascinating flavor profiles that I've come to love.

Reds are often delightful, though you should ask for a taster because they can often be slightly bitter. Stouts are flavorful, dark beers perfect in winter. Similar to reds, they're not always to be trusted, but they make some of my favorites. Try the Obsidian Stout from Deschutes Brewery for a great example. Others swear by the Ninkasi Vanilla Oatmeal stout.

- If it's an IPA from a Northwest brewery, I wouldn't bother. The PNW is known for overhopping its beer, and IPAs usually bear the brunt of that pain. Cringing through a bitter brew is not a good way to impress that good looking hipster hovering by the bar. Luckily, those same micro-breweries often have plenty of other options for those of us who love drinking booze that actually tastes good.

Best of all, ask your bartender! They'll know the tap list better than anyone, and if you tell them you hate hoppiness they'll help you out. Don't forget to tip, and happy drinking! ■

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