

Brew Barrel Review Part 2

If you have been following this blog you'll have seen me testing out a Brew Barrel beer kit last week and having a go at making some beer and I guess you want to know how it went?

If you haven't seen part 1, you can see it here: <http://www.eliapplebydonald.co.uk/blog/brew-barrel-reviewing-a-beer-kit/>

General views

Last week I made up the kit following the instructions and posted the video here to let you see. I generally found it incredibly easy to do, the instructions were very clear and well illustrated which I think made them perfect for someone who has never done anything like this before. Essentially with this kit you just pour everything into the mini keg add water and then leave it to sit for 5 days. That's it. The downside of this process is that you don't actually learn anything about making beer, you don't learn any transferable skills that you could then take with you to make beer again using different kits. Even the language used in the instructions and marketing material lacks any real brewing terminology. But I made the kit up as instructed and left it in my cupboard under the stairs for the 5 days. This however was where I noticed the first thing that I think could have caused a bit of concern for novices.

Each day of the 5 days I found quite a sizeable puddle of beer and foam on top of the keg. Now I imagine someone who doesn't have the knowledge of brewing would either just leave this or wipe it with a cloth. However both these actions could potentially attract bacteria and spoil the beer. Because I have prior knowledge of the brewing process I knew to clean the keg each day and more importantly sanitise it to prevent the risk of infection. After all the keg isn't sealed, it has

an air relief valve on top which can allow unwanted nasties into the keg and your beer.

One concern I had was that even after the 5 days, the keg was still foaming, I did wonder if this meant fermentation hadn't finished, but as you are not taught about this on the kit instructions I acted as anyone else would and didn't leave the kit any longer, it went into the fridge for 2 days as instructed (maybe to stop fermentation)?

This is where the fun started. I set up the camera to record my review of the beer, and tapped the keg as instructed. Boom, beer fountain. There was just too much pressure in the keg and beer went everywhere, all over me, the laptop I was recording with, the seat, the table, even the plant beside me so I had to stop recording to get everything cleaned up. I did try to vent the excess pressure by letting some of the beer flow from the tap, however this was crazy as well, I lost about 1.5 litres of beer as foam. So for a 5 litre mini keg, I lost beer every day with it leaking from the valve in the keg, I lost it in the beer fountain and I lost it in the explosion from the tap so I didn't get anything like the 5 litres.

Unfortunately this is a real negative point as the kit itself is incredibly expensive. To buy this kit including postage would have been £33.50 for 5 litres. Your average home brewing beer kit costs about £12 – £20 pounds for 23 litres. Big difference, especially when you work out that to get 23 litres from this kit would be around £154. Eek!

So I did eventually get all cleaned up and managed to vent the excess gas from the keg after a few tries, and managed to have a taste.

How does the beer taste?

Given the cost of the kit, I was expecting a beer that was a little better than a standard beer kit product. Again I was

disappointed. My first instinct on smelling the beer was that it had in fact got infected, there was this really sharp, astringent smell. Quite overpowering and in the video below I think my face says it all. I did eventually realise that this was in fact the grapefruit chemical addition, it wasn't as I had assumed a grapefruit like aroma like you get from new world hops, it was actually grapefruit, like someone had poured grapefruit juice into the beer. It completely overpowered everything else.

On tasting the beer, there really was nothing to write home about. I think at the time I kept saying that it was "drinkable" and to be fair it was drinkable. I wouldn't order a pint of it in a bar and I certainly wouldn't pay for it but it wasn't hideous, just not very pleasing. The grapefruit aroma didn't immediately come through in the taste of the beer, however it did leave a really strong chemical after taste that wasn't pleasant.

Overview

Unfortunately I really couldn't recommend this kit to someone who wanted to get into brewing their own beer, it just doesn't have any of the elements of actually brewing your own beer and certainly didn't give me a beer which would make me want to do it again.

I do however see that its market maybe isn't the home brew community, I think this is more likely to appeal to folk wanting to buy a quirky gift, maybe from one of the websites like "firebox" or "not on the high street". It's a gimmick for home brewing rather than an actual home brewing experience.

I'm sorry Brew Barrel, it's just not for me.

As I said the video review didn't go to plan, but you are welcome to watch me get drenched in beer if you want to have a giggle.

Brew Barrel – reviewing a beer kit

Something a little bit different for you. I've been sent a [Brew Barrel beer kit](#) to review here's a wee video where I test out how simple the kit is to use and next week I'll add another video of my review of the actual beer.

For those of you who are unable to watch the video, I've added my written review underneath.

Brew Barrel: My review



Brew barrel is a beginners level beer kit allowing people with no or very little experience to brew a beer at home. Basically it's dehydrated beer, just add water and stir. So if you can make a cup of tea, you can make beer using a beer kit.

There are two differences with this kit though;

1. that they claim your beer will be ready to drink in just 7 days. That's a big claim as a normal beer can take from 4 weeks upwards to be ready to drink,
2. you make and serve everything in one vessel, no need for separate fermenting buckets or bottles so it doesn't take up a lot of space. Unfortunately it's a mini kegs which only holds five litres so at around £33 for this kit (including delivery), it's quite expensive per pint for homebrew.

So what was it like to use?

Well I have to say, pretty easy. The instructions are really well written and illustrated making them easy to follow. Given that it's a beginner kit, this also means you aren't having to get to grips with proper ingredients, there is a bottle of ready-made liquid extract in the box and some little bottles of hop extract/oil for flavour.

For me, I was a bit disappointed at the lack of options, but I'm someone who already brews and is used to being able to completely control my beers. I found it frustrating that there was no real detail of what you were buying. I got a pale ale, but don't know if it's a British or American version, also no idea what the bitterness level is or even what the alcohol percentage of the beer should be.

Looking at this through the eyes of a beginner though (which is their aim), I guess its a bout keeping things simple and taking away anything which could be seen as difficult or technical which might scare people off.

I did find a couple of things difficult, opening the little bottles of hop oil was a bit fiddly, they all had child proof caps and everyone knows adults can't open child proof caps. Also trying to push the barrel bung/vent into place was really hard but apart from that, really simple. You simple pour the liquid malt extract into the mini keg, top it up with

specified amounts of hot and cold water, then add the yeast and hop oils and that's it. Leave it for a week and bob's your uncle.

I guess the big test will be next week when we taste the beer, so pop back then to see a full review.

The Goblin Queen has landed



Well we promised you an update on our beer making fun and so, here it is.

Our first attempt at making beer had been an aussie style lager which was "ready" for drinking at the end of June. We tested it at various points along the way and were really happy with it, and so were the friends we asked to test it. It was a really good sunny day beer and we have enjoyed one or two in the garden on a sunny day with a BBQ.

So buoyed with the confidence of that success we decided to try a dark ale (after all I am a big ale fan and Kate doesn't mind a wee ale either). So our first ale went in the

fermenter, with a wee tweak or two to the recipe to add some of the things we like. We substituted some of the sugar for dry malt to give it a bit more of an ale feel.

We let this one sit for a fortnight in the fermenter to make sure the yeast had done it's work before we bottled it and added more sugar to allow the yeast to carbonate it.

The beer has more of a ruby colour than a brown ale and when we were playing with the idea of a name for it we came up with Goblin Queen as we are both fans of Hobgoblin ruby ale.

We even had a wee taste alongside a Hobgoblin just so that we could have a wee compare and we were really please. It's a bit warmer than the Hobgoblin, less hoppy and we absolutely love it.

The best thing, although we have tested it, it won't properly be ready until the end of July, so it is only getting better as it sits and conditions in the bottles.

We've already started planning for our next batch, we are going for an amber ale and we are going to play with the idea of "oaking it". Watch this space.