

Pre-mixed Drinks Challenge



More medals were presented at this year's competition. Hamish Smith charts the rise of the pre-mixed drink

With convenience at its heart, the pre-mixed drink is always going to involve an element of compromise – the category will probably never be one for the purist. But that doesn't mean it should be spared our scrutiny.

This is a big sector that's getting bigger. According to First Drinks, pre-mixed volume is increasing by 30% a year in the UK – one of the category's leading lights – and is now worth about £70m. That's because 'convenience occasions' are multiplying as we become busier and lazier. Even the home – the

one place we might have the time and tools to self-open, mix and decant – consumers are now seeking the easier option.

The Pre-mixed Drinks Challenge has charted the category's rise. In the event's fifth year the standard has climbed a notch or two. Of the 50 entrants to the blind tasting, seven gold medals were awarded – two more than last year. There were 10 silvers and 13 Bronzes. The medal haul for the class of 2013 is indeed testament to the progress that this still-adolescent category is making.

Whether consumers are becoming more discerning or companies more exacting, the rise in standard

was noted by our longstanding judges. This year the panel comprised Chris Kelly from the WSET; Joey Medrington, bar trainer at Bacardi Brown-Forman; Elliot Ball, bar manager of London's Shaker and Co; Martin Green, assistant editor of Off Licence News magazine; and Hamish Smith, deputy editor of Drinks International.

Products that fared well followed a simple enough formula. Their makers achieved a liquid that shared its colour and texture with the cocktail it imitated. The products offered some definable and appropriate aromas, exhibited balance between acidity and sweetness on the palate, featured fresh,

not concentrated, fruit juice where juice was used, offered little in the way of artificial flavours and included the right spirit for the cocktail.

Cast your eye over the gold medal winners to the right of the page. Each of these products ticked most, if not all, of our judges boxes. Of course, among the gems, there were some rough old rocks too.

One judge remarked: "The good pre-mixed drinks are very good, but the bad ones are very, very bad. Where is the quality control with some of them?"

He was right, this category does offer shelter to some quite derisory concoctions. One could well have passed for TCP, such was its pungent smell.

Others were so sweet they would have made a child wince, and a few were so inappropriate in colour it was doubtful that any of the correct ingredients had been used.

But let's dwell on the positives, not the negatives, because we have unearthed some very enjoyable products. Look how far we've come – a pre-mixed Mojito is not beyond the invention of mankind. We have also found that good mixers and quality spirits do sometimes cohabit cans.

Not to be overly Darwinist but it is these pre-mixed drinks that will ultimately survive the category's evolution.

Gold Medals



Bar2DR Mojito – Bar2DR
Coppa Cocktails Margarita – Coppa Cocktails
Coppa Cocktails Sex on the Beach – Coppa Cocktails
Funkin Strawberry Daiquiri – Funkin
Greenall's Gin & Tonic – G&J Greenall
Sainsbury's Kentucky Bourbon & Cola – Sainsbury's
WKD Vodka Remix Apple Cut – WKD Remix

Silver Medals



Bloom & Fentimans – G&J Greenall
Sainsbury's Rum, Lime & Cola – Sainsbury's
Bar2DR Cosmopolitan – Bar2DR
Authentic Cocktail Pina Colada – Authentic Cocktail
Greenall's Gin Fizz – G&J Greenall
Funkin Pina Colada – Funkin
Funkin Mojito – Funkin
WKD Remix Citrus Cut Vodka – WKD Remix
Greenall's Gin Sin – G&J Greenall
Echo Falls White Zinfandel Spritz – Echo Falls

Bronze Medals



Sainsbury's Gin & Tonic – Sainsbury's
Vikingfjord Mojito – Vikingfjord
VK Cocktails Margarita – VK Cocktails
Bar2DR Margarita – Bar2DR
VK Cocktails Cosmopolitan – VK Cocktails
Vikingfjord Cosmopolitan – Vikingfjord
Hardys Strawberry Bellini – Hardys
Joe's Cocktails Elderflower & Cucumber Gin Sling – Joe's Cocktails
Blackberry & Pear Vodka Fizz – Joe's Cocktails
Mixtender Piña Colada – Mixtender
My Mocktail Pina Colada – My Mocktail
My Cocktail Woo Woo – My Cocktail
Greenall's Gin & Pink Grapefruit – G&J Greenall

Design & Packaging

Gold Medal



Bloom & Fentimans – G&J Greenall

Silver Medals



My Mocktail Woo Woo – Manchester Drinks
My Cocktail Woo Woo – Manchester Drinks
Tails Cosmopolitan – Tails