



Real choices for ale drinkers

There has never been a better time to be a real ale drinker, so here's a quick guide to enjoying the best of what's available locally...

Bottles:

Advantages – Small quantities (normally 500ml), long shelf life, flexible serving temperature (if you want to put them in the fridge to chill slightly then it is easy to do so).

Disadvantages – Some can be too fizzy, most national brands have too much carbonation, which reduces the flavour. Heavy bottles to carry.

Bottle-conditioned

Bottle-conditioned beers have a small amount of sediment at the bottom of the bottle, (this will vary between breweries). The bottles need to be stored upright and poured carefully in one go, leaving a small amount of beer in the bottle. There are some really excellent bottle-conditioned beers out there. This type of beer is more likely to improve/change with age than bright or brewery conditioned ones.

Bright or Brewery conditioned beers (No sediment)

These are easier to look after, you can pour the whole contents in and not have to worry about leaving the sediment behind. There are some really good bottles of ale that are not bottled- conditioned. These also tend to have more consistent flavours and carbonation.

Polypins (Bag in a box):

Similar to the bag of wine in a box from the supermarkets, most breweries offer Polypins & Minipins, different breweries call these different things but effectively it is a bag of beer in a box, (cider also available this way). For this you normally have two options of size, either a 10L (minipin) or 20L (polypin), approx 17 and 35 pints respectively, some breweries offer 5L containers but these are quite rare. The great thing about minipins and polypins is that when compared with firkins, the beer stays in good condition for longer and does not 'go off', because air cannot get in and spoil the contents.

Sedimented or bright?

Most breweries will offer the option of both sedimented and bright polypins. Which of these you choose depends on your situation. If you are looking for the beer to be as close as possible to real ale in a pub and have somewhere to leave the beer to settle for 24 hours, then sedimented is the best option. The ideal storage temperature is between 10-15°C to get the best conditioning and flavours.

Sedimented Advantages

- As close as possible to the real thing, great flavours and good conditioning.
- Can last as long as 3-4 weeks if kept cool and with no air getting in (it shouldn't if you progressively tilt the box as it gets drunk).

Bright Advantages

- It can be moved as much as you like and poured straight away (ideal for taking to a party or camping trip where you are going to drink it all over a few days).
- If you like the ale cooler than the current temperature where you were planning to drink it, then the polypin can be placed overnight in a colder place, (like a cellar or chiller), and then bring it out when you are ready to drink it.
- Every last drop can be drunk with no risk of a cloudy beer.

Bright Disadvantages

- Will only last for 3-4 days, sometimes longer but this depends on the conditions you keep it in; also the higher the alcohol by volume, (abv), the longer it should last. In addition, the more hops that are used in the brew the better, as they help to preserve the beer.

Sussex is fortunate in having more than 20 breweries, all producing excellent real ale from, predominately, locally sourced ingredients. Much of this is available for drinking at home, both bottled and in 'boxes'. For further information see BeerMat.co.uk, or phone 01444 241093