

# SEEING THE LIGHT

Tim Newman, Michael Donaldson, Denise Garland, Vera Alves



**They say you** can judge a brewer's skill by trying their lowest ABV beer. With that in mind, our team looked for the best "light" beers we could find. Light? In New Zealand there is an excise tax step at 2.5 per cent and because of that, we see a lot of beers in that 2-2.5 space as it represents a cost saving for brewers on excise.

Hitting the 2.5 per cent ABV with a beer that still tastes like beer is a challenge. Aside from the fundamental hurdle of working with half, or less, than the usual malt allowance, there's something else standing in the way of good light beer that's intrinsic to how all bottles, cans and kegs

are made, and that's CO<sub>2</sub>.

Carbon dioxide doesn't just power the bubbles in our beer, it has a taste and a texture. It's sharp, crisp and drying on the tongue, and adds lift to any drink it's dissolved into. Just taste some soda water to get an idea of its solo character, and you could try a flat lager to see what a significant effect its absence has on beer.

In lager's case (and in most beer), the character of the CO<sub>2</sub> is beneficial – but in a light beer with fundamentally less concentration of flavour, that character can take over. This can result in the dreaded "soda water" taste dominating the palate. Light lagers are especially vulnerable, but beers with a more expressive malt character can stand up rather well.

Over the last few years, the needle has been moving towards better quality light beers from our craft producers, and you'll notice that there's a conspicuous minority of lagers on our list. Does that mean we're going to see a 2.5 per cent dark beer around the corner? That might be wishful thinking, but what we guarantee is that the quality and diversity of these light beers is going to continue to rise.



## TOP FIVE

### CASSELS LIGHT OWL

A relatively new release from Cassels, but clearly one that a lot of thought and brewing precision has gone into. Superb hop aroma on the nose with pine, grapefruit and nectarine all coming through loud and clear. More fresh citrus on the palate along with a smooth malt backbone, maintaining an exceptional weight and body into the robust finish. It's that strength of body that allows Night Owl to carry so much more hop intensity and, consequently, such an amazing density of flavour. Whatever alchemy Cassels have discovered here, they've brewed a light beer that's truly operating on a level above.

Tim Newman



## RECIPE

### "SUN SKIPPER" HAZY IPA

Close your eyes and open your mouth... This brew will take your palate on a journey you won't soon forget! It's a love letter to our dearly departed summer sun, bursting with bold tropical flavours. With a classic hop arrangement of Citra®, Amarillo® and Mosaic®, every sip brings zesty citrus and tropical notes with a dash pine thrown in for good measure. Combine that with a BESTMALZ®'s exceptional BEST Heidelberg and you have an fine malt backbone that brings a light sweetness to proceedings. Added rolled and malted oats join the fray to bring out the creamy mouthfeel and body that we love from the style. The Sun may have skipped town now that it's Autumn, but this tropical beauty will always be there when you need it.

## MALT

BEST Heidelberg ————— 80-

Thomas Fawcett Oat Malt ————— 15-

Flaked Oats ————— 5-

## HOPS

	(g)	Time
Citra® Brand- T-90	30	Whirlpool (90°C for 20 mins)
Mosaic® Brand- T-90	25	Whirlpool (90°C for 20 mins)
Amarillo® Brand- T-90	15	Whirlpool (90°C for 20 mins)
Citra® Brand- T-90	100	Dry hop (day 1 bio-transformation)
Mosaic® Brand- T-90	50	Dry hop (day 1 bio-transformation)
Citra® Brand- T-90	75	Dry hop (terminal gravity 4 days)
Amarillo® Brand- T-90	75	Dry Hop (terminal gravity 4 days)

## YEAST

WLP066 – London Fog Ale Yeast– 2 x 40mL Packets or 1 x With a 1L starter.



Batch size: 18L  
OG: 1.057  
FG: 1.010  
ABV: 6.2%  
IBUs: 22.1  
EBC: 5.7  
Efficiency: 72%

## BREWING SALTS

Calcium Chloride (4g)  
Calcium Sulfate (2g)

## METHOD

- Mill grains. Heat strike water to achieve a mash temperature of 66°C, add to mash tun along with brewing salts.
- Add the grain and mash for 60 mins.
- Once mash in is complete, recirculate and sparge at 75°C, transfer wort to kettle once sparging complete.
- Boil for 60 mins. Once boil is complete start the whirlpool, adding the whirlpool hops at 90°C for 20 mins. This should give a desired IBU of 22.
- Once Whirlpool is complete, transfer to fermenter and chill to 18°C.
- Pitch 2 x 40mL packets of White Labs WLP066 London Fog or 1 x packet with a 2L starter.
- After 24 hours add 100g of Citra® and 50g Mosaic® for bio-transformation and then allow the beer to free-rise to 22°C.
- Once terminal gravity has been reached add the remaining dry hops for 4 more days.
- After 4 days crash chill to 0°C for 3 days.
- After 3 days bottle or keg and enjoy.

WWW.CRYERMALT.COM

**CHOICE BROS REBEL REBEL**

Rebel Rebel labels its 2.2 per cent offering as a Session Pale Ale – but it has a surprising, and delicious, twist. This low alcohol beer is made with Belgian Ardennes yeast, which gives the pale ale a strong apricot aroma and flavour, and a spritziness that tickles your tongue. The stone fruit character balances nicely with the light malt base and some citrus from the hops, giving off a lovely note of boiled lollies.

Denise Garland

**MCLEOD'S NORTHERN LIGHT LAGER**

I find it hard to be impressed by a lager, let alone a low alcohol one. So, imagine my surprise pouring a can of McLeod's limited edition small batch Northern Light to find that the 2.3 per cent ABV did not take anything away from its full body, crisp profile and dry finish.

Vera Alves

**NORTH END PETIT LUNA**

Perhaps the cleverest little beer in this line-up, and I'd like to see more breweries experiment with non-hoppy sources of flavour. Hibiscus brings some fruity character and the pink colour. Kaffir lime coupled with spicy Belgian yeast also do some heavy lifting, and it's all held together with refreshing tartness and spritz carbonation. **Michael Donaldson**

**EDDYLINE EDDYLITE SESSION PALE ALE**

The only one on this list to be presented in a solo 440ml can,

EddyLite is a 2.5 per cent beer that's been given the full craft treatment. It is double dry hopped, which really comes through in the aroma, with fresh pine and tropical fruit to spare. Rapid, refreshing and a keenly hop-driven palate with a super drinkable crispness, and bitter snap on the finish. As an example of a beer that keeps everything within the tight margins while still bringing the modern heavily aromatic style of pale ale, EddyLite really sends it.

Tim Newman

**HIGHLY COMMENDED****CROUCHER LOW RIDER**

Probably New Zealand's most celebrated low-alcohol beer. In many ways, it's almost become the flagship beer for Rotorua's Croucher Brewing – a remarkable feat for such a low ABV product. It's changed and evolved over the years into an almost perfect distillation of all the best aromas and flavours of an IPA. Robust, loads of hop character, great balance. **Michael Donaldson**

**URBANAUT****JUNO LITE HAZY PALE ALE**

There's been a surge of light beers riding the hazy wave recently, and the quality has been distinctly hit and miss. But this from Urbanaut is soundly one of the hits. Bold hop impact with sweet orange citrus, peach and white grape. Less bombastic than the nose, the flavours start off mild and stay mild, which allows the hop driven

character to sustain through to the finish, avoiding the trap of collapsing the mid-palate by trying to balance too much on top of it.

Tim Newman

**SUNSHINE LIGHT PILSNER**

Nothing short of amazing. Smells like the real deal and tastes great too. The body, naturally, is a little shallow, but shallow can be good: like standing knee deep in the ocean and having the waves splash around your legs. The hoppy aftertaste, with a nice broad bitterness, just says "more, more, more". **Michael Donaldson**

**THREE BOYS LOCAL SESSION LAGER**

Three Boys Local lager is a mainstay of Christchurch functions and restaurant drinks lists, and one I've often found myself reaching for when I start to feel that fourth glass of pinot catching up to me. Beautiful noble hop aroma of fresh florals and lemon myrtle, with just a drizzle of sheer malt sweetness further in. The palate starts with an effervescent kick, subsiding into clean dry maltiness and finally back into the noble hop character alongside a tight bitterness in the finish. Light, almost to the point of austere, but beautifully poised, focused and elegant. It's a lager that embraces its dainty character, rather than trying to emulate anything stronger.

Tim Newman

**TOWNSHEND HALF MAST**

I was referred to this beer by a reader who told me it was the best



low alcohol beer in the country. He hit the bullseye. Typically of Townshend beers, this is all about balance and the fruity expressive hops are perfectly restrained to match the 2.2 per cent base. A wee gem. **Michael Donaldson**

**8 WIRED LO-FI**

I've always thought a hoppy sour was tailor-made for a low ABV beer and this is it: Lo-Fi is sharp as a tack with pinging citrus and light acidity it packs way more flavour that should be feasible at 2 per cent ABV.

Michael Donaldson

**THREE BOYS LOCAL SESSION IPA**

This brings some traditional English character to bear with a balance of malt and hop expression. Significant toffee malt along with earth, spice and dried fruit on the nose. More chewy malt on the palate, with ripe apricot and more delicate white fruit. Medium bitterness and body, with a satisfying

rounded fullness to the finish. A mild but nonetheless substantial IPA that embraces its malt and benefits from it immensely.

Tim Newman

**GARAGE PROJECT FUGAZI**

One of the lightest examples in this mix at 2.2 per cent. Pungently hoppy with grapefruit, orange zest and pine suggests the low ABV might carry the hop weight, but the palate is like a flyweight boxer – deceptively strong – it comes out aggressive and delivers right through to the long, bitter finish.

Michael Donaldson

**ROCKY KNOB UNDIES**

A standard bearer for the Bay of Plenty brewing scene, Rocky Knob have had a cult following for some years thanks to their Snapperhead IPA. Here, they've gone for a 2.5 per cent "mini" IPA and won more fans with the juicy dank hop aroma and caramel maltiness.

Michael Donaldson

**SPEIGHT'S MID ALE – BEST BUDGET BUY**

Out of the vast ocean of the light offerings mass-produced by the big brewers, Speight's Mid Ale rises to the top. The reason isn't because it hits the mark better than the rest; it's because it takes aim at a much more realistic target. Whereas the other mainstream variants are pared down versions of lagers that often teeter on the verge of tastelessness, Speight's Mid Ale (though still taxonomically a lager) presents as more of a brown ale with some genuine malt heft. Toffee and wholemeal toast on the nose with some cool hop grassiness, while on the palate there's a satisfying gristy crunch, with faint golden syrup and seed crackers. Crisp, complex (comparatively) and complete. For a budget light option, this is my pick 10 times out of 10.

Tim Newman

