

Festiv-Ale Two: A Review

by Bev Robertson, President, The Bushwakker Brewpub

REGINA - We now have two editions of **Festiv-Ale** behind us (last year's and the expo this past weekend) and *Savour Life Magazine* has asked me to provide an assessment. Before doing so, I need to make not one but three disclosure statements with regard possible conflicts of interest. First, the **Bushwakker** brewery participated in both editions by presenting some of its beers at the festival. My comments will then refer to Festiv-Ale without Bushwakker beer. Next, the organizers asked me to provide assistance with regard beer terminology and beer style information. And finally, I have been involved in judging the beer submitted to the amateur brewing competition part of the festival program.

Festiv-Ale was conceived when a group of representatives of imported beer in Regina convinced Adele Lohman, a professional marketer, to organize a festival in Regina at which they could present their products to the public. Festiv-Ale reflects its genesis. Its marketing is first rate and it seeks to generate adequate revenues to pay for a top quality advertising campaign. This contrasts with Regina's previous attempt at a beer festival, **Harvest Moon**, which was presented from 1997 to 2001. Harvest Moon tried to keep both costs and entry fees low. The types of beer available at Festiv-Ale also reflect its origins. Compared with other beer festivals a large fraction of beers presented at Festiv-Ale are foreign imports. Furthermore, those imports tend to be from nations and areas of the world not exactly known as members of the elite brewing nations.

But Festiv-Ale is nevertheless a worthwhile investment in time and money for the more serious beer hunter because of the presence of beers from several Canadian microbreweries. Those available at Festiv-Ale this year were from **Mt. Begbie, Vancouver Island, Mill Street, Alley Kat, Unibroue, McAuslan, Wild Rose, Half Pints** and **Fernie**. Two relatively new Saskatoon Microbreweries, **Paddockwood** and **Mano's**, also showed their wares. Collectively, the beers from these Canadian craft breweries offer a variety of styles and good quality products.

The most interesting beers associated with the festival were the top winners of the amateur brewing competition conducted by the **Ale and Lager Enthusiasts of Saskatchewan**. On the whole, they were also better brewed, truer to style and freer of defects than most of the commercial beers offered. Unfortunately, only the beer judges got to taste them.

The fourth place winner was actually not a beer but a sweet still melomel, brewed by Jamie Singer, current ALES president, and Jim Van Dusen. A melomel is a mead made from honey and fruit. Third prize went to a pumpkin ale, also brewed by Singer and Van Dusen. Second place went to a version of my favourite beer style, Saison, brewed by Mark Heise. The winner was a Strong Belgian Blond Ale, also brewed by Singer and Van Dusen.

The remarkable thing about Festiv-Ale Two is that it existed at all. When Adele Lohman and her team approached us about participating in their first event, we were, to say the least, skeptical. They had shown up to that point that, in spite of their skills at marketing and organization, they knew very little about beer or beer festivals. But they were persistent and persuasive. They proved us wrong. The first Festiv-Ale attracted many more paying customers than we had predicted and the team went on to present version two this year. They may justifiably now claim "We told you so!" In particular, Adele Lohman deserves acknowledgment for her persistence and skills in making Festiv-Ale a reality. The group is now marketing itself as a beer festival management team and has already made its first sale to Fredericton N. B.