



BEER JUDGE CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

BEER SCORE SHEET

Category # _____ Subcategory (a-f) _____ Entry # _____
Subcategory (spell out) _____
Bottle Inspection: Appropriate size, cap, fill level, label removal, etc. _____

Judge Name (print) _____
Judge Qualifications (check if appropriate):
 Apprentice/Novice
 Experienced (but not in BJCP)
 Professional Brewer
BJCP Rank (check if appropriate):
 Recognized Master
 Certified Grand Master
 National Honorary Master

Descriptor Definitions (Mark what apply)
 Acetaldehyde - Green apple-like aroma and flavor.
 Alcohol - Higher alcohols. The aroma, flavor, and weight of the beer. Lingering harshness and esters.
 Astringent - Puckering, dry, Harsh grip on the tongue.
 Diacetyl - Artificial buttery/butterscotch dryness in the finish/aftertaste or slicked and flavor. Sometimes perceived as tongue.
 Estery - Aroma and flavor. At low levels may be cooked, canned, or rotten vegetables.
 Estery - Aromatic fruits, fruit flavors, take on solvent notes. Many are similar to vinyl esters. Many are levels esters.
 Tinny - Tinny, or combination of winy, plastic, papery, styrofoam-like aromas and flavors. Any one or combination of clove-like aromas and flavors of higher alcohols (fusel) similar to acetone or lacquer thinner aromas. Unpleasantness in aroma and flavor. Can be sharp acid, vinegar-like (acetic acid), or Sensation experienced mostly on the tongue.
 Oxidation - The aroma of rotten eggs or cooked, or rotten vegetable aroma and


Appearance (as appropriate for style)
Comment on color, clarity, and head retention, color, and texture) _____
Mouthfeel (as appropriate for style)
comment on body, carbonation, warmth, creaminess, _____

Overall Impression
Comment on overall drinking pleasure _____
Score _____
Standing (45-50)
Excellent (38-44)
Very Good (30-37)
Good (21-29)
Fair (14-20)
Problematic (0-13)

So you want to be a Beer Judge



by Gordon Strong



Whenever I tell people I'm a beer judge, they often get a sly look on their face like they're sharing an inside joke. Wink, wink, nudge, nudge, say no more. "You get to drink free beer? Sounds easy! Where do I sign up?"

If only it were that simple. It might sound trite, but judging beer is a lot more work than it sounds, particularly if you want to do a good job at it. When homebrewers enter competitions, they're hoping for an honest evaluation of their beer and practical suggestions for improvement (well, that plus some prizes). In order to fulfill this promise, a good beer judge relies on practical knowledge of beer styles, brewing processes, troubleshooting, as well as good sensory evaluation skills. That's fine, but how does a prospective judge gain this knowledge and learn these skills?

Fortunately, there is an organization that can help. The Beer Judge Certification Program (BJCP) is a group serving the needs of more than 2,000 active beer judges. Its mission is to help people understand and appreciate world beer styles, and to develop good judging skills.

Getting Involved

You don't have to be a member of the BJCP to judge in a competition, but it certainly helps. Competition organizers get your name from the BJCP and contact you when events are held in your area. If you're not in the BJCP or want to search for competitions or beer-related events in a wider region, see the sidebar "Finding Local Events."

The BJCP provides a wide range of educational and reference materials for judges. A comprehensive beer, mead and cider style guideline helps judges understand world beer styles and locate good commercial examples. While designed as a reference for judges in a competition setting, the style guidelines are also a great training tool.

Resources designed to help prepare a judge for the BJCP exam (e.g. Exam Study Guide, Mastering the BJCP Exam presentation, sample scoresheets) are quite helpful for any judge. They also provide links to other books and references for self-study. Training, reading, self-study and practice will only get you so far, however.

The best way to learn about judging is to steward or judge at a local competition. If you volunteer to steward, you can observe the process, taste the beers, listen to the comments of the judges and review their scoresheets. If you volunteer as a novice judge, you can fill out scoresheets and take part in the discussion. In either case, be sure to identify yourself to the other judges as a person interested in learning. Most judges will be happy to take some extra time to explain things to you, or to point out common tastes or faults in beer. If you are unsure of anything, ask questions!

Learning to Evaluate Beer

Whether tasting beer by yourself, with a group of other beer enthusiasts or with other judges at a formal competition, there are several basic steps that you should follow when evaluating a beer.

1. Understand the style. Before you even open the bottle, make sure you know what to expect. Read the style guidelines. If you're not familiar with the style, try to sample some of the commercial examples cited in the guidelines.

2. Try to identify and describe what your senses perceive. Pay attention to the relative intensity of perceptions. Try to focus on one sensation at a time, and look for subtle flavors and aromas after the prominent ones have been noted.

3. Many aromatics in beer are quite volatile and tend to dissipate rapidly. Quickly sniff a beer after it's poured to detect these. Also note how the aroma changes over time.

4. Take a look at the beer, preferably by holding it up to a light. Observe the color, clarity and head formation and retention.

5. Take a sip of the beer. Assess different flavors of ingredients (malt, hops, yeast, water) and also the strength, dryness, balance, carbonation, mouthfeel, finish and aftertaste of the beer. Note any off flavors or unusual characteristics. Take small sips and assess different elements with each sip.

6. Observe how your impressions change over time. If a beer is too cold when poured, its character often becomes more apparent as it warms.

Some of these steps can be quite difficult, particularly if you don't have a well-

FINDING LOCAL EVENTS

Hooking up with other beer geeks at local events is a great way to get involved. Here are a few ways to find places where you can taste or judge beer, or to meet people of similar interests.

The AHA and BJCP maintain Web pages with competition information; the AHA site has information about both homebrewing and professional competitions. The AHA and the BJCP cross-post their competitions, so they should contain similar data. However, it's always best to check both sources.

► BJCP Competitions:

www.bjcp.org/compsch.html

► AHA Homebrew Events:

www.beertown.org/homebrewing/events.asp

► AHA Professional Events:

www.beertown.org/craftbrewing/events.asp

The best way to find local beer geeks is to drop in on a homebrew club meeting. Find clubs in your area using the AHA club locator at www.beertown.org/homebrewing/listings.asp

Other suggestions:

- Check your local paper for weekend events. In the summer, there are often many festivals, state or county fairs and other tasting-related events.
- Talk to other local beer geeks and see if they have mailing lists or other resources for local activities.
- Check with local homebrew shops and good beer stores. Ask a lot of questions.
- Try cross-training. Go to wine tasting events. You might also find information about meads or ciders at fall festivals, Renaissance Fairs and

developed vocabulary of beer terminology or don't have much experience in differentiating your perceptions. When choosing the right word or phrase to describe a particular aspect of a beer, try to identify what you smell, see or taste in the greatest detail possible, including both quantity and quality. For example, if you smell hops, are they strong or weak? Do they have a floral, citrusy or earthy aroma? Can you identify them as English, American or noble? Try to identify secondary characteristics, not just the dominant ones. Be specific; don't use subjective words like "good" or "appropriate" if you really mean "rich caramel malt taste" or "strong Cascade hop aroma."

If you have trouble differentiating between similar flavors, aromas or colors,

CHECKLIST FOR EVALUATING BEER IN COMPETITIONS

Here's a quick set of reminders on how to evaluate a beer and fill out a scoresheet in homebrew competitions:

- ✓ Before the beer is poured, take a look at the bottle. Is the fill level too high or low? Is there a telltale infection ring? Is it bottle-conditioned? Note your observations.
- ✓ When you open the bottle, listen for the *plfff*. Watch out for gushers. Note anything out of place.
- ✓ Pour the beer down the center of a clean, clear glass or hard plastic cup. Adjust your pour based on the observed carbonation to give the beer a good presentation.
- ✓ Immediately take a sniff. Write down your perceptions under Aroma. Don't score it yet.
- ✓ Take a look at it. Note the color, clarity and head character. Assess it based on the style. Write in a score for Appearance.
- ✓ Sniff it again. Have the perceptions changed? Write down your opinions on how well it matches the style.
- ✓ Take a taste. Write down the first flavors you detect. Describe all aspects of the flavor profile, noting the most dominant ones first.
- ✓ Take a second taste. Record additional impressions and opinions. Assess the taste against the style guidelines.
- ✓ Take a third taste. Concentrate on body and mouthfeel. Write down a score for Mouthfeel.
- ✓ Swirl the cup and take another sniff. Record any final impressions and enter a score for Aroma.
- ✓ Take a final taste and record final thoughts. Enter a score for Flavor.
- ✓ Provide overall comments and feedback to the brewer under Overall Impression. Enter a score based on your desire to have another (basically, how enjoyable it was to drink).
- ✓ Calculate your total score. Adjust it to match the Scoring Guidelines on the scoresheet.
- ✓ Double-check your math. Make sure you have filled out the scoresheet legibly and completely. Mark any checkboxes in the Descriptor Definitions column if they apply.
- ✓ Make sure you have given constructive criticism and accurate feedback to the brewer. Suggest ways to improve the beer, particularly if you have deducted for faults or stylistic inaccuracy.
- ✓ When all judges have finished, discuss your thoughts. If other judges detect something you missed, see if you can find it. Adjust your score if necessary so all scores fall within five points.

Practice working quickly yet thoroughly so you can complete your individual assessment of one beer within six to 10 minutes. Try to have a final score assigned within 10 to 12 minutes, 15 at the most. Pace yourself, and take breaks if necessary. Keep your palate cleansed and stay sober and objective.

try different samples side-by-side. See if you can detect differences and then describe them. The more accurately you learn to tell the difference between similar beers, the better judge you'll be. If you don't understand what common faults taste like (for example, diacetyl), ask other judges to point out good examples when they find them. Or ask other judges to describe the faults in terms you might understand (for example, "diacetyl reminds me of buttered movie theater popcorn").

When assessing a beer in a competition setting, you have to do more than simply describe the beer you're sampling. You also have to judge how well the beer matches the style guidelines, and offer suggestions when the beer has flaws either in the technical brewing process or in stylistic accuracy. The standard BJCP scoresheet helps you collect and organize your thoughts, as well as

providing helpful definitions of terms and reminders of characteristics to assess.

Scoresheets Facilitate Communication

A beer scoresheet accomplishes three basic goals: it provides a standardized means to conduct competitions; it records all pertinent feedback from judge to brewer; and it allows beers to be ranked. While all brewers like to win competitions, most are seeking a professional evaluation of their beer and hope to receive helpful guidance on improving their brewing. The means by which this is communicated to the brewer is the scoresheet.

Since brewers are paying for the evaluation of their beer in a competition, it is very important for judges to take the scoresheet seriously. If brewers do not receive value for their entry fees, they will not enter competitions again. Therefore, it is also

vital for organizers and judge directors to seek competent beer judges who understand this process.

A properly completed scoresheet should display five basic qualities: accuracy, consistency, completeness, legibility and professionalism. Beers should be scored appropriately for their quality. All beers should be judged similarly and fairly. A judge should be thorough in describing all perceptions, since skimpy scoresheets are infuriating to entrants. If entrants cannot read the comments, judges are not adding value. Constructive criticism delivered with a positive tone is much more useful than a simple recitation of faults.

There are strong parallels between the process of evaluating a beer and filling out a scoresheet. The scoresheet is actually structured to facilitate recording judge perceptions and comments. The sections of the scoresheet (aroma, appearance, flavor, mouthfeel and overall impression) are listed in the same order that a judge should use in assessing the beer. Each section contains helpful reminders on the attributes to be assessed (for example, the flavor section says “comment on malt, hops, fermentation characteristics, balance, finish/aftertaste and other flavor characteristics”). Try to say something about each of those elements, even if you’re noting the absence of them (such as, “aroma lacks hops”).

Phases of Completing the Scoresheet

I usually teach people to assess a beer and record their comments on a scoresheet in three phases: perception, appreciation and feedback. In the perception phase, the judge simply records all aroma, appearance, flavor and mouthfeel perceptions without making any value judgments on them. It is helpful to mention characteristics in the order that you perceive them, and to try to quantify their intensity or strength. For example, if you detect hops in the aroma, were they the first thing you smelled? How strong are they in relation to the other aromatics? Also try to be specific about the nature or quality of the perception. For example, rather than saying you tasted “malt,” can you say whether it was grainy, bready, toasty, roasty or caramel-like? When you can use these

qualifiers in describing your perceptions, you are passing on much more useful information to the brewer.

In the appreciation phase of completing the scoresheet, the judge should relate perceptions to the requirements of the style guidelines. Here is where knowledge of beer styles is most useful. Make sure your comments reflect the proper beer style, not your personal prejudices. A beer does not have to be technically flawed to be stylistically inaccurate. For example, you might note that a beer has a “beautiful golden color with brilliant clarity” but then go on to state “unfortunately a dry stout should be dark black and opaque.” Be sure you know the style you are judging, and evaluate it constructively.

In the feedback phase, the judge should suggest corrective actions to the brewer for any technical or stylistic faults noted during the assessment. These corrective actions might include suggestions on ways to improve ingredient selection, equipment handling, brewing process or packaging of the beer. Don’t make undue assumptions about how the beer was made; if you don’t know, don’t guess. Make suggestions when unsure (for example, if a beer had too much body and residual sweetness a judge might note, “if this was an all-grain beer, try mashing at a lower temperature; if this was an extract beer, try a more fermentable extract”).

When completing scoresheets in a homebrew competition, a judge should rely upon a mental checklist to ensure all aspects are properly evaluated. A summary of the process I use is presented in the sidebar “Checklist for Evaluating Beer in Competitions.”

Practice Makes Perfect

When it comes to judging, there is no substitute for practical experience. While the best comprehension can be gained from actual judging in a homebrew competition, don’t overlook the value of structured practice either in private sessions or with other judges in informal settings.

Anytime you taste a beer, get in the habit of running through your mental beer evaluation checklist. If you aren’t writing anything down or discussing your impres-

sions with others, this exercise should take less than a minute and require no more than two or three sips. Then you can relax and enjoy the rest of your beer as your personal reward.

When practicing beer evaluation with other judges, discuss your perceptions and

ONLINE JUDGING RESOURCES

There are a large number of beer, brewing and judging sites and discussion groups on the Internet. While many resources exist, here are a few select sites and mailing lists that I find particularly helpful. Keep in mind that learning about beer styles, tasting world class beers, understanding brewing processes and developing evaluation skills are all important for judging.

- ▶ **BJCP Web Site:** www.bjcp.org/. Authoritative source of data on the program; includes major sections on exams, competitions, beer styles and administration. Be sure to look at the Exam Study Guide (www.bjcp.org/study.html), the Mastering the BJCP Exam presentation (www.bjcp.org/mastering.pdf) and sample scoresheets (www.bjcp.org/examscores.html).
- ▶ **JudgeNet:** Online e-mail digest for judges, www.synchro.com/judge. To subscribe, send a message to mailserver@synchro.com with “subscribe judge” as the message subject or body.
- ▶ **Homebrew Digest (HBD):** Online digest for homebrewers, <http://hbd.org/digest/>. To subscribe, send a message to homebrew-request@hbd.org with “subscribe” in the message body. Back issues are available at <http://hbd.org/archives.shtml>.
- ▶ **Usenet Brewing Group:** rec.crafts.brewing. Wide range of topics.
- ▶ **Beer Advocate:** www.beeradvocate.com. Interesting collection of comments and information about commercial beers, including ratings.
- ▶ **Pubcrawler:** www.pubcrawler.com. Find and rate breweries, brewpubs and beer bars around the country.
- ▶ **How to Brew:** www.howtobrew.com/. John Palmer’s online book on brewing is a great reference for technical brewing issues.

There are many portals, forums and general beer sites on the Web. My apologies to all I’ve omitted from this list due to lack of space.

impressions. Try to learn if you are particularly sensitive to certain aromas or flavors, or if you have a sensory “blind spot.”


If you have structured training sessions, be sure to practice recording your perceptions and comments on scoresheets. This will help you increase your judging speed. Strive to understand the characteristics of ideal examples of each style. In a practice session, consider trying good commercial examples along with homebrew versions of the same styles.

Whether you record full comments or not, get in the habit of assigning a numeric score to the beers you taste. Compare your scores to other judges so you can develop a sense of scoring calibration. This is often the most difficult skill to learn, and can only be gained through practice with others.

Homebrew clubs often organize BJCP study groups. Even if you don't plan on taking the exam, these classes can provide a wealth of information on beer, brewing and judging. Most classes will try to sample good examples of all the beer styles in the BJCP guidelines. The interaction with other enthusiasts and ability to ask questions enhances the learning experience. If your local club doesn't plan on offering a course, there's a good outline in the BJCP Exam Study Guide; organize one yourself.

Don't overlook online resources (see the sidebar “Online Judging Resources” for more information). There is a wealth of Web-based information that can facilitate self-study. Communities of brewers, judges and beer enthusiasts are never shy in discussing their opinions, and can supplement your local resources.

Whatever sources of information you choose, the only limiting factor is your own motivation. Do some research, find local enthusiasts, get involved, build up your confidence and gain experience. Finally, remember to share what you've learned with others—the world always needs more knowledgeable beer judges.

Gordon Strong has been a homebrewer since 1996 and a beer judge since 1997. He is the ninth person to reach the Grand Master I beer judge rank, reached the Master rank faster than any other judge in the program and is currently third in overall BJCP experience points. He lives in Beavercreek, Ohio. 



***Editor's Note:** One way beer judges check their palates is by using commercial “calibration” beers—classic versions of the style they represent. Zymurgy has assembled a panel of four judges who have attained at least the rank of Master in the Beer Judge Certification Program. Each issue they will score two widely available commercial beers (or meads or ciders) using the BJCP scoresheet. We invite you to download your own scoresheets at www.bjcp.org, then pick up a bottle of each of the beers and judge along with them in our Commercial Calibration. This issue, in honor of American Beer Month, we take a look at two of the classic icons of the American craft beer revolution: Anchor Steam Beer and Sierra Nevada Pale Ale.*

MEET OUR PANEL OF JUDGES



David Houseman lives in Chester Springs, Pa. He has been a homebrewer for 13 years and a BJCP judge for 11 years, progressing to the Grand Master II Level. He has been on the AHA Board of Advisers since 1998 and is the current chairman. He is the BJCP competition director and a member of the style guide committee. He has a wife, two kids, a cat and a dog and when not brewing is often seen on local soccer pitches as a USSF referee. While he enjoys all beer styles and brews most of them, a Guinness draught is his session beer unless he's visiting his favorite watering hole, Victory Brewing Company.



Beth Zangari has been brewing and judging since 1992. She was instrumental in founding the Hangtown Association of Zymurgy Enthusiasts (HAZE) and the Queen of Beer Women's Homebrewing Competition in 1994. She recently achieved the BJCP Master level, and humbly requests the forgiveness of all whom she may have offended along the path. She lives in Placerville, Calif. with her husband Craig and many cats.



Scott Bickham lives in Corning, N.Y. and has been brewing and judging since 1991. He has a Ph.D in condensed matter physics. He has judged in more than 75 homebrew competitions, is a Grand Master II judge, and has been either Exam Director or Associate Exam Director of the BJCP since 1995.



Gordon Strong lives and brews in Beavercreek, Ohio. Since taking up brewing in 1996, he has brewed more than 90 batches of beer, mead and cider. He joined the Beer Judge Certification Program in 1997 and achieved the rank of Master I faster than anyone in the program. He currently ranks third in the BJCP in experience points. He is chairman of the current ad hoc BJCP Style Guideline Committee and is the principal author of most new style descriptions.



Category/subcategory: 6A American Pale Ale

Sierra Nevada Pale Ale: Brewed by Sierra Nevada Brewing Co., Chico, Calif.



Dave Houseman

Bottle Inspection:

Commercial bottle with yeast sediment present. Shipped from West Coast.

Aroma:

Light caramel and roasted barley/malt aroma with light to moderate hop aroma. Hop aroma lower than expected. Low berry-like fruitiness. No diacetyl. Clean aroma; no faults. (9/12)

Appearance:

Light amber color with nice tight, long lasting head. Some chill haze—clear but not brilliant. All appropriate to style. (3/3)

Flavor:

Clean, sweet malt flavor up front with sustaining, high hop bitterness to balance, leaving a lingering hop bitterness in after-taste. Some fruitiness, no diacetyl. Alcohol noticeable. Low caramel malt with hints of roasted barley/malt seems evident. Hop flavor moderate, OK to style but additional hop flavor would be welcome. (16/20)

Mouthfeel:

Medium bodied with mousy sensation on the tongue with some astringency along with hop bitterness on the back of the tongue. Aftertaste is moderately dry. (5/5)

Overall Impression:

Classic American Pale Ale exhibiting hops prominently, although primarily in bitterness. Additional hop flavor and aroma would be great but still a very drinkable beer. (8/10)

Total score: (41/50)



Beth Zangari

Bottle Inspection:

Light layer of yeast at the bottom of the bottle. Commercial bottle purchased locally.

Aroma:

Big time DMS right off the bat, with a slight sour-ish note. Blows off after a minute. No malt; citrus hop aroma dominates. (8/12)

Appearance:

Deep golden with profusion of even tiny bubbles rising to top. Head is not thick, rather is a ring of foam around the glass edge, and a lingering dust of foam across the surface. (3/3)

Flavor:

Grapefruit citrus hop aroma and flavor dominate. Some caramel malt flavors emerge as the beer warms, slight diacetyl notes in mid palate. Aggressive hop bitterness lingers. (17/20)

Mouthfeel:

Carbonation is prickly, combined with a medium body gives the beer an almost creamy texture. Lingering bitterness is drying, almost astringent. (4/5)

Overall Impression:

The huge DMS at the front almost turned me away. After it blows off, what remains is much closer to a classic though somewhat aged example of pale ale. The caramel maltiness is just enough to carry the aggressive hop bitterness, enough to produce "Bitter Beer Face" in some, though I happen to enjoy the "good wolf." Diacetyl and remaining sulfur notes add interest and character rather than detract from the beer. (8/10)

Total score: (40/50)



Scott Bickham

Bottle Inspection:

Commercial bottle. Purchased locally. No dust on bottle, warmed to ~50° F before tasting.

Aroma:

Initial scent of paper as the beer was poured indicates some oxidation, also has a slight mustiness. Hop character comes through as new-mown hay rather than the citrus and floral notes found in fresh examples of this beer. Low level of crystal malt. No fermentation character is evident. (5/12)

Appearance:

Effervescent with exceptional clarity. Bronze color with ruby highlights. The head is white with uniform tiny bubbles and very good retention. (3/3)

Flavor:

Initial impression is a soft malt backbone that eventually yields to a clean hop bitterness that lingers on the back of the tongue. The hop flavor is subdued, and the new-mown hay character is again apparent. The finish has a slight metallic edge. Fermentation profile is clean with subdued esters. (13/20)

Mouthfeel:

Low to medium body with good carbonation. Some residual sweetness remains on the lips after swallowing. The finish has a mineral quality not unlike some British Pale Ales. (5/5)

Overall Impression:

This is a well-crafted beer that was unfortunately mishandled or served beyond its prime. The exceptional balance saves this beer, but more fresh hop aroma and flavor are needed. (6/10).

Total Score: (32/50)



Gordon Strong

Bottle Inspection:

Commercial bottle, purchased locally.

Aroma:

Initial citrusy hops fade quickly into a toasty, bready, slightly sweet malt bouquet. Clean fermentation character. No esters. Slightly stale. Expected more hops. (8/12)

Appearance:

Large, off-white head settles slowly. Golden amber color. Moderate haze from small particles in suspension. (2/3)

Flavor:

Some toasty, bready malt along with a light citrusy hop flavor. Clean fermentation character, no esters. Slightly woody hop flavor persists into aftertaste. (13/20)

Mouthfeel:

Medium to medium-full body. Moderately high carbonation. Fairly smooth. Body seems very full for style. (3/5)

Overall Impression:

Once an American classic, now seems a shadow of its former self. Seems dumbed down to little more than a Blonde Ale. Where have all the hops gone? Seems very malty, sweet and full-bodied. Possibly suffering from age (can't tell from the bottle.) I'd mash lower to cut the body and crank the hops up by one-third throughout. (6/10)

Total score: (32/50)



Commercial Calibration

Category: 6C California Common Beer

Anchor Steam: Brewed by Anchor Brewing, San Francisco, Calif.



Dave Houseman

Bottle Inspection:

Commercial bottle. Shipped from West Coast. Nothing remarkable.

Aroma:

Aroma dominated by caramel and slight roasted malt/barley with low hop aroma. No esters or diacetyl. Hop aroma especially of Northern Brewer hops could be more assertive but there are no faults in the aroma of this beer. (10/12)

Appearance:

Light amber with orange tints. Chill haze present. Light head but fairly good retention. Only moderate carbonation. (3/3)

Flavor:

Caramel and light roasted malt/barley with balancing hop bitterness. Light woody hop flavor that is subservient to the malt. Crisp flavor, no diacetyl or esters. Finish is sweet up front and a little drying bitterness lingers. Alcohol is not assertive. No flavor faults. (14/20)

Mouthfeel:

Medium body with light, mousy mouthfeel. Moderate bitterness on back of the tongue. No astringency; fairly creamy. (5/5)

Overall Impression:

A very drinkable beer. While Anchor Steam is the arch prototype for the California Common Style, additional hop flavor and aroma would help to distinguish it from the American Amber since this beer seems very close to that style. (8/10)

Total score: (40/50)



Beth Zangari

Bottle Inspection:

Commercial bottle. Purchased locally.

Aroma:

Woodsy floral hop aroma, toasty caramel maltiness. A vague quality reminiscent of newly turned earth. (10/12)

Appearance:

Deep golden with amber undertones, brilliant clarity. Head forms thickly with even bubbles, but dissipates quickly to a ring of foam, could be my glass. This dusting remains to the end, leaving a lace on the glass. (3/3)

Flavor:

Rich caramel malt balanced with a firm hop bitterness that lingers. Alcohol is evident in this sample. A meaty substansiveness follows a woody hop quality, perhaps a wee bit of DMS showing. As the beer warms, a bit of soapy, cardboardiness creeps in reflecting the beer's age. Also appearing is a pleasant stone-fruit (almond/apricot) flavor distinctive to this style, though at low levels in this sample. (17/20)

Mouthfeel:

Medium body with firm carbonation. Prickly to the mouth, but not gassy; bitter, but not astringent. Alcohol is evident, though not warming. Pleasant. (5/5)

Overall Impression:

I have had fresher examples of Anchor Steam than this example, and I have had less fresh samples from the same source. While this example has the characteristics I look for in a classic Steam, those characteristics are somewhat subdued. I am looking for more hop aroma present in fresher examples, as well as more caramel/crystal malt. (9/10)

Total Score: (43/50)



Scott Bickham

Bottle Inspection:

Commercial bottle, purchased in Rochester.

Aroma:

Toasted malt is initially evident, but there are strong musty and papery notes from oxidation. Earthy phenols linger in the background along with a touch of fruitiness. No hops are apparent. (7/12)

Appearance:

Deep copper in color with excellent clarity. Conditioning is excellent, with good head retention and tight beading. (3/3)

Flavor:

Malty up front — toasted and bready with a little crystal malt sweetness. Earthy flavors are apparent but cannot pinpoint whether they originate from hops or fermentation. I would expect pungent and woody flavors from Northern Brewer hops in a fresh sample. Finish is clean and pleasant, with a long bitterness. (13/20)

Mouthfeel:

Creamier than the draught sample. Medium body with some residual sugars. Touch of astringency that is common in beers with high hop rates. (5/5)

Overall Impression:

Good drinkability in spite of a little oxidation. The toasted malt up front and the long hop bitterness in the finish are not unlike some of the brewpub Altbiers, but there is more fermentation character and complexity in the aroma and middle part of the flavor. (7/10)

Total score: (35/50)



Gordon Strong

Bottle Inspection:

Commercial bottle, purchased locally.

Aroma:

Toasty malt and woody, earthy hops. Moderate staleness and some papery tones. Slightly sour nose. Expecting cleaner, fresher, more intense aromatics. (7/12)

Appearance:

Very large, off-white head. Very creamy and long-lasting. Quite clear — no appreciable haze. Medium to deep amber color. Very pretty. (3/3)

Flavor:

Toasty malt with an initial sweetness and low but noticeable esters. Moderate hop flavor: woody, earthy, minty. Moderate bitterness lasting into the somewhat dry finish. Esters increase as it warms. Malt flavors are rather muddy, muted and stale. Hops linger in finish longer than malt. Smooth, clean fermentation character. (14/20)

Mouthfeel:

Medium to medium-light body. Medium-high carbonation with a prickly mouthfeel. Slightly astringent. (4/5)

Overall Impression:

Somewhat past its prime but well balanced. Dry finish allows hops to be more noticeable. Hops are rather muted — more aroma is needed — flavor is OK, a bit more bitterness would be welcome. Nice esters, they add balance and complexity. Toasty malt is flavorful. (7/10)

Total score: (35/50)