

Session Beers

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What Is Session Beer?

- Not just low in alcohol
- A combination of restraint, satisfaction and 'moreishness.'
- Flavorful enough to be interesting, without wearing out the palate
- Beer for a social occasion



Varying Definitions

- 5 - 6% ABV often described as 'sessionable'
- Some commercial 'session' beers up to 6.2% (!)
- The Session Beer Project draws the line at 4.5%
- GABF category allows up to 5.1%
- Traditional session beers were usually 3.2 - 4%



Coniston Bluebird Bitter

ABV: 4.2% (3.6% on cask)

Malt: Maris Otter, Crystal

Hops: Challenger

“Bluebird is a fine session ale with a light golden colour. The intense resinous and spicy hop character which is the beer’s hallmark is derived from the use of unusual quantities of English Challenger hops, each bale being individually and personally selected by the brewer. The malt is, of course, Maris Otter fermented slightly warm to give a soft fruitiness with a faint hint of scented geranium.”



Roots in England

- Long established pub culture
- Pub sessions may last hours
- 1913-1945 Average gravity drops
- Average gravity stayed low post WWII
- Classic session beers:
Mild, Bitter, Brown Ale/Porter, Stout



Session Beer in Other Cultures

- Lower ABV lagers in Czech and German beer halls
 - Pilsner (Desitka), Helles, Kolsch
- Most beer sold in Belgian bars was 4% or lower through the 1950s.
 - Witbier, Belgian Pale Ale, Saison
- Different than 'table beers'



Origin of the Term

- WWI-era regulated sessions?
- Not called 'session beer' until recently
- PA Bitter (1.035) has “Sensible gravity for a drinking session...” -Dave Line, 1978
- Helles (4.8%) are “everyday session beers” - Michael Jackson, 1982



Stone Levitation Ale

OG: 1.048 FG: 1.013 ABV: 4.4%

~85% Pale Malt

~15% Crystal (75/150)

<1% Black Malt (for color)

45 IBU

Bittering: Magnum

Kettle: Amarillo

Whirlpool: Crystal, Simcoe

Dry hop: Amarillo

Mashed at 157. WLP007



Session Beer in America

- Slow to gain traction
- Reaction to extreme beer in the mid 2000s
- Homebrewing/craft generates interest in classics
- GABF category, 2008
- Notch Brewing, 2010
- Session Beer Project, 2009
- NorCal Session Fest, 2013



Session IPA

- All the hops, half the alcohol
- Begins to appear in the mid-90s (Uinta Trader)
- 3.8 - 4.9% ABV, 40-60 IBUs
- Some contention persists over the name



Ballast Point Even Keel

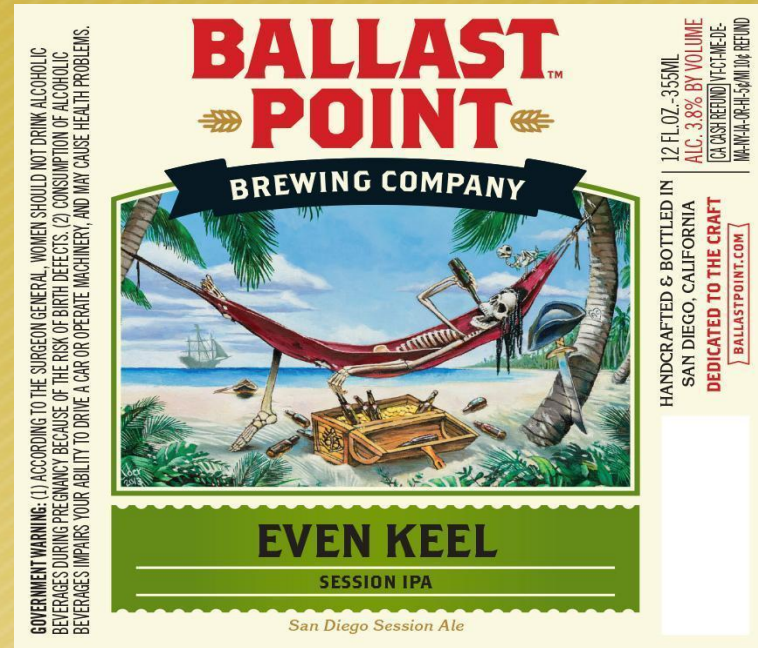
OG: 1.039 FG: 1.010 ABV: 3.8%

10 Different Malts

6 different hops, heavy on whirlpool and dry hop

40 IBU

Mash temp: 154



Challenges to Brewing

- Difficult to hide flaws
- Low starting gravity can equal thin & watery
- Good process & ingredient selection is vital
- Keeping everything in balance



Building a Recipe

- Flavorful base malt
- Wheat, Oats or Rye for body & complexity
- Character malts in slightly higher percentage
- Avoid simple sugars



Building a Recipe Cont'd

- Keep BU:GU similar when scaling a recipe
- Use black malt or carafa for color
- Choose a less-fermentable extract



Drake's Alpha Session

OG: 1.041 FG: 1.012 ABV: 3.8%

2-Row

Maris Otter

Crystal 45

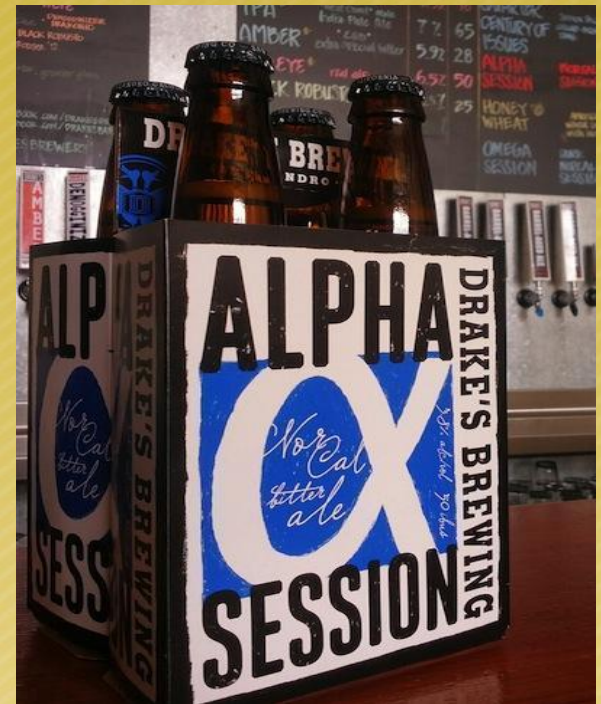
50 IBU

Bittering: Bravo

Whirlpool: Citra

Dry hop: Simcoe, El Dorado, EXP01210

Mash at 156. WLP001



Mashing and Boiling

- Mash high: mid to high 150s
- Non-standard hopping techniques:
 - Hop bursting
 - First-wort hops
 - Large dry-hop
- Use hops known for smooth bitterness



Fermentation & Carbonation

- Consider a less-attenuative, characterful yeast
- For extract, can use maltodextrine
- Low to moderate carbonation



Recipe: Tasty's Session Pale Ale

43% Rahr Two-row

OG: 1.044

FG: 1.014

ABV: 3.9%

19% Crisp Maris Otter

14% Castle Belgian Pilsner

14% Crystal 15

5% Crystal 40

5% Carapils

21 IBU Chinook @ 60min

12 IBU Cascade @ 20min

9 IBU Centennial @ 10min

Mash at 156 for 45 minutes.

Boil 90 minutes.

Ferment at 66F with California Ale yeast.

Dryhop with ½ oz per gallon Centennial



Further Reading (and Drinking)

- sessionbeerproject.blogspot.com
 - Michael Tonsmiere on Beersmith Podcast
 - byo.com/stories/item/2264-session-beers-techniques
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- 21st Amendment Bitter American
 - Shipyard American Pale Ale
 - Odell Loose Leaf Session Pale Ale
 - Drake's Omega Session
 - Boulevard Pop-Up Session IPA
 - Victory Swing Session Saison
 - Goose Island Honkers Ale
- Pizza Port Twerp
 - Deschutes River Ale
 - The Bruery Hottenroth
 - Dogfish Head Ta Henket

