

'Sleepless in Seattle'

...attending a conference, trade exhibition and judging at a beer competition.

The craft beer brewers of the United States meet annually for a conference and trade exhibition organised by the Brewers Association. Every two years, it is also host to the World Beer Cup. In 2006 the event was held in Seattle, Washington state, home of Boeing, Starbucks and America's hop industry.

By **Paul Buttrick**
Beer Dimensions

Every year, the Brewers Association (BA) runs a Craft Brewers Conference and BeerEXPO trade exhibition. The event is held in parts of the USA where there is a thriving craft beer community with breweries to visit and beer to sample. In alternate years, the BA also hosts the World Beer Cup competition. In 2006, a World Beer Cup year, the venue was the magnificent Washington State Trade & Convention Centre in Seattle. The north-east USA, is home of American hop growers, and where many of the original craft breweries sprang up. In this part of the world, the 'Hophead' brewers produce many beers of almost extreme hop flavour and bitterness. World Beer Cup judging was on Monday & Tuesday 10–11 April, The Conference ran from Wednesday 12th until Friday 14th April and exhibition Wednesday & Thursday 12–13th April.

The Brewers Association is based in Boulder, Colorado. It is a not-for-profit trade and educational association for small traditional and independent breweries and also has a membership of over 10,000 home brewers. The Brewers Association organises the annual Great American Beer Festival in Denver and



The Seattle city skyline includes the 605 foot high 'Space Needle' built for the World Fair in 1962. The inset shows the impressive entrance to the Washington State Convention Centre where all the events were held.



publishes the *New Brewer* magazine. Its mission statement is 'to promote and protect American craft beer and brewers, as well as the community of brewing enthusiasts'. The author was judging beers at the World Beer Cup for the third time and was also presenting a paper on 'How to brew and present perfect cask conditioned beer' at the conference.

Craft Beer in the United States

The numbers behind the growth of craft beer in the United States are impressive and were supplied by Paul Gatzka, Director of the Brewers Association, as part of the conference's opening session.

The craft beer market has been growing in the US for the last 25 years. The 1980s saw a rapid increase in small breweries and brewpubs and the sector now brews nearly 10 million hl of beer per annum and achieved a growth of over 9% in 2005, this compares with a fall of 1% for the non-craft sector. The market has grown such that nearly 60% of people in the United States now live within 10 miles of a craft brewery. There are 1,415 craft breweries in total: 979 brewpubs (mean size 700 hl/annum), 380 micro breweries (up to 15,000 hl/annum) and 56 regional brewing companies (>15,000 hl/annum). The annual revenue from these businesses is greater than four billion dollars. As with small independent brewers in the UK, the 'route to market' is probably their biggest challenge.

The World Beer Cup

This year 2,275 beers were entered from 55 countries in 85 style categories. Gold, silver and bronze awards are made for each beer style. Judging was carried out 'blind' by an expert panel of brewers, but also included beer writers, consultants and suppliers. The organisation and integrity of the event was excellent. Gold medal winners from the UK came from Fuller Smith and Turner, Meantime Brewing and Roosters Brewery; it is particularly pleasing that Fullers ESB won the ESB class gold medal! The competition is not limited to smaller beer companies, Miller won the champion large brewery and brewmaster accolade; Anheuser Busch and Heineken-owned breweries won a clutch of medals,



Seattle is famous for seafood – fancy a lobster tail?



A judging session at the World Beer Cup.

and Inbev won a gold medal with Hoegaarden.

The Craft Brewer's Conference and BeerEXPO America

The conference and exhibition are fully integrated, highly informative and sociable. This year there were over 1,800 attendees from different sections of the industry – brewery and brewpub owners, business managers and practicing brewers. It was a perfect event for learning, networking, doing business and sinking the odd beer.

In order to stage the Craft Brewers Conference, a sub-committee began work last year, evaluating proposals and approaching speakers. There were 32 talks in all, divided into four seminar tracks: brewpub management and marketing,

micro/regional brewery management and marketing and two tracks on technical brewing. The main conference was supplemented by additional seminars on the wholesaling of speciality beers and a course run by Micromatic on draft beer dispense.

The presentations were mainly held at the beginning and end of the exhibition day, to ensure that seminars did not detract from the exhibition. The sessions were very well attended and my own presentation on cask beer pulled in a full house of over 200 people, even at 8.15 in the morning. The range of topics was wide and interesting such as: five great ways to build sales and one really lousy one; the control of four common beer problems through developments in yeast vitality measurement and fermentation management; the healthy brewer – tips on how to care for your body, a naturopathic perspective and gluten-free beer. There were also panels of experienced brewers and experts, normally four people, answering questions on a series of topics which this year included: packaging; brewing Belgian beers; raw materials, and oak-aged beers. These were excellent forums for raising current issues, and unlike in the UK our American friends were not embarrassed about sharing or revealing their problems.

Keynote speech

The conference opening session was a grand affair in a packed main conference hall. The Mayor of Seattle welcomed delegates to the city and speakers from the Brewers Association gave 'state of the nation' assessments of the craft beer industry. There were also awards to

three outstanding craft beer people, The Russell Schehrer Award for innovation in brewing went to Dan Carey of New Glarus in Wisconsin; the Brewers Association Award for contributions made to the craft beer movement was presented to Chuck Skypeck for his chain of three Bosco's Brewpubs in Arkansas and Tennessee; and the F.X. Maxx, Defense of the Small Brewing Industry Award was received by Dan Bradford, publisher of *All about Beer* magazine and a former BA President.

The keynote address was given by Sam Calagione, founder and owner of Dogfish Head Brewery, which brews unusual beers with unique and interesting flavours. Sam, who was named the Small Business Association 'Businessman of the year', gave an inspirational speech with references to Bob Dylan and the punk rock era. Also catching my ear were references to wine, the flavour of which was based on where it was produced, but beer is based on people and their 'toa'; plus something else to ponder on – 'tradition is a group of experiments proven to succeed'.

BeerExpo America

The exhibition was also a 'sell out' event and is the largest brewing industry trade show in North America. 150 stands were taken by all sizes of company and provided a great opportunity for brewers and suppliers to meet and discuss business in an informal environment. The event is supported by well known global suppliers of the beer world such as Huppmann, KHS and Pall, as well as smaller companies that are owner managed. A full range of products and services were on offer, ranging from complete brewing plants, raw materials, packaging equipment, dispense equipment through to technical training suppliers such as the UC Davis in California and VLB in Berlin. Most exhibitors were in single booths, but there were a few who had larger stands, these tended to be the bigger companies such as the Brewers Supply Group who are a major supplier to the craft beer sector.

A buffet lunch was provided for all attendees and there were sponsored 'beer stations' dotted around the hall where local beer was available – it's thirsty work visiting stands and chatting! There were a number of British exhibitors, some with their

UK successes – Glenn Payne (Meantime) and John Keeling (Fullers) pick up their Gold Awards at the Gala Dinner.





US agents, among these were Tim Gatenby (Simpsons Malt) Pete Robson (Muntons Malt), Ian Isherwood (Hops from England), and Ray Marriott (Botanix) held a lecture and beer tasting on the use of hop oil preparations. Simon Wheaton (Cypher Co) was selling plastic casks, which gives US brewers the opportunity to test cask beer without heavy investment in metal casks. I also met a number of ex-pat Brits who had moved to the US and were working in the beer business. Incidentally, the longest queue seen during the week was for a personal signing by Michael Jackson of his latest book on Belgian Beers.

WBC Gala Dinner and Awards Ceremony

The Awards ceremony was the last event of the week and was attended by many brewers, judges, exhibitors and officials. It was a splendid affair held in the Washington Conference centre. The menu was chosen to demonstrate the part played by seafood in the city of Seattle. Previous World Beer Cup award winning beers were chosen to complement the tuna, mussels and smoked wild salmon dishes. A huge number of bottles from the competition gave an amazing assortment of styles and flavours for pre and post dinner sampling. The award ceremony itself was a slick but quite lengthy affair, with over 200 accolades handed out. It was however a lively event, with every winner greeted with true American whoops and yelps, but more reserved applause for the giants of brewing fraternity.

What did I make of it all?

Well, it was very enjoyable, and 'Sleepless in Seattle' applied to quite a few participants. The organisation of all events was first class, as was the hospitality. If anyone was in any doubt where the

conference was taking place, the opening session and World Beer Cup Gala Awards Dinner proved that it could only be in the USA. An enthusiastic and positive 'can do' atmosphere prevailed with sharing and delighting in people's successes which was a great feature of the Awards Ceremony. What particularly impressed me was the interest and thirst for knowledge of many of the people I met. In the UK asking questions is sometimes taken as showing a weakness, this didn't seem to apply, asking questions was all about getting an answer to help improve one's beer or business. There has been a great deal of



development of the programme as the event has progressed from the early days in the 1990s. Here are a few things I think helps contribute to that success:-

- Location – Holding the event in a beer orientated town/city is important. There have to be plenty of good places to go to drink quality, interesting beer, and if there are breweries to visit and host events, that's even better.
- Where the event is held – The venue must be central and easy to get to for all delegates and exhibitors. The facility must be in or near the centre of the chosen town or city – anywhere that requires anything

ABOVE RIGHT: There was a good attendance and high levels of concentration for all the presentations, even at 8.15 in the morning!

ABOVE: Expert panels gave tips and advice on a number of technical topics.

Photos by Jason E. Kaplan



Charlie Papazian, President of the Brewers Association welcomes delegates to the Conference and Exhibition.

Photo: Jason E. Kaplan

Beer EXPO America was a 'sell out' for exhibitors and had many trade visitors.



but minimal transport from hotels etc for the events or evening entertainment would prove difficult and unattractive.

- **Content** – The Craft Beer Conference covered a large range of current technical and business topics, that appealed to owners as well as their brewing teams. The fact that the exhibition was also 'sold out' showed that the right people were coming together to do business.
- **Sponsorship** – Sponsorship and partnership is vital to running a successful event. The Seattle week had six 'partner' and 'corporate' sponsors for the World Beer Cup, and seventeen different sponsoring organisations for the conference

and exhibition. Raw material suppliers figured highly, and other sponsors included process filtration, packaging and packaging materials, keg management and technical training. There were plenty of opportunities to talk beer and have a good time

Ask people if an event was successful, they will answer yes if : they've had a good time socially; met new people with whom they have a lot in common; had the opportunity to network and learnt something new that will help their business – either during a social event or at the exhibition.

It was impossible to feel lonely in Seattle. There were so many

things going on apart from the conference and exhibition.

Brewery tours of local micro and pub breweries, official welcoming events, social evenings and tastings hosted by sponsors and local breweries were all high quality and the hospitality was superb.

Conclusion

It was a very enjoyable, interesting week, the hospitality, quality and organisation were excellent. However, I confess to being 'hopped out' by mid week, after sampling cask conditioned Double IPA, dry hopped with Galena. I retired to bed with an ice cold carton of milk provided by the hotel night porter! Normal sampling was resumed the following day. ■

The Gala Awards dinner was a sumptuous affair.



● As a regular contributor to *The Brewer & Distiller*, Paul Buttrick needs no introduction. Contact him on: paul.buttrick@beerdimensions.com
The Brewers Association website is at www.beertown.org