



## On-Tap

Greg Evans

### More Than Ninety-Nine Bottles of Beer On The Wall

Now in its thirteenth year, the Great Canadian Beer Festival (GCBF) has become a fixture in our city. Held at Royal Athletic Park each year on the weekend following Labour Day, it's a great way to learn about and savour great beer as well as help to raise some money for local charities. While dozens of festivals have sprung up around North America, the GCBF is one of the oldest and certainly one of the most highly regarded. When asked why this is, festival chairman Gerry Hieter responds, "In our thirteen years we've never compromised our vision to provide the best real ales and lagers available in North America. This, combined with being in the greatest city in the world, is the perfect recipe for beer festival success".

The GCBF gives micro-breweries and brewpubs an opportunity to show their wares. You'll find that many bring seasonal specialties or special festival brews to share with the public. No doubt you'll find the brewmasters themselves available to answer questions about their individual beers and to discuss the finer points of brewing. "The GCBF is an important event to brewers" many of whom don't even sell beer in this market. With no medals or awards on the line, the only motive for them to be here is the pure joy and enthusiasm for their craft a chance to strut their stuff, so to speak" says Hieter.

As for a strategy, here are some tips from a seasoned festival goer. First, visit the festival web site ([www.gcbf.com](http://www.gcbf.com)) and find out which breweries are coming. Once at Royal Athletic Park, take the time to study the festival program and to become familiar with the layout of the site. You'll quickly learn the location of the brewer's booths, the food vendors, where to purchase beer tokens, displays by industry suppliers of hops, yeast and equipment and of course, the washrooms. And when in doubt, stop by the Campaign For Real Ale - Victoria booth (near the main entrance) and ask for directions.

Second, think about purchasing a festival glass holder. A great invention, they hang from your neck, hold a festival sampling glass beautifully and allow you to be "hands free" when you're eating, reading your program or shaking the hand of a long lost friend. Third, remember that you can't try everything. Have an approach to sampling. You can focus on brewers whose products you have never sampled before, whether they be locally brewed or those from further a field and which are not readily available in Victoria. Another approach is to focus on a style - say Indian Pale Ales or wheat beers. Or if you wish to paint broader brush strokes by trying a wide range of styles, then remember to start with lighter beers and work your way up to the darker varieties. And above all, pace yourself. You want to be able to taste and enjoy the beer - too much too quickly, may dull your ability to taste the subtle complexities of individual beers. And don't forget to take time to eat, sit or just listen to the music.

Over the years, I have always tried to get to the festival shortly after it opens as you improve your chances of sampling the popular beers. It is also worth considering attending on the Friday of the festival, a day that tends to be less crowded meaning shorter line-ups and much less chance of popular beers running out. And as a final tip, I have also always made tasting notes in my program on the beers I have sampled, which is a great help for subsequent festivals or for when visiting either the local liquor store or breweries or pubs outside of the province.

Beer festivals can be fun. So grab a pair of comfortable shoes, make sure you arrange to get home safely and enjoy the wonderful world of beer.

*Greg Evans is the Executive Director of the Maritime Museum of B.C. and a brewing historian.*

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