

Cider sales soar as old favourite returns

DANIELLA MILETIC

The Age, January 28, 2010



Michael and Drew Henry sample their cider. *Photo: Daryl Pinder*

WHEN the Henry family started making cider 15 years ago, demand for the apple drink was dismal.

But recently Drew Henry, who with his wife and son runs an orchard and cidery at Harcourt, north of Melbourne, says cider's popularity has skyrocketed. "Back when we started, everyone in Australia believed cider was a sweet, fizzy alternative to beer for young women to drink," he recalls. "The number of retailers that I tried to sell our ciders to would tell me flat, 'I can't sell cider'."

Today, sales of handcrafted and mass-produced ranges of cider are soaring.

According to ACNielsen figures, cider consumption has increased fourfold in the past three years. Last November, volumes climbed 27.4 per cent compared with a year earlier. But even so, cider share in Australia is only about 1 per cent of volume within the total liquor market - far lower than Britain's 7.5 per cent.

To tap into a this expanding share, the bigger beverage companies are creating cider brands and expanding their cider ranges. There has also been an increase in marketing of sweeter ciders, attributable in part to the tax on pre-mixed drinks.

Carlton & United Breweries, which makes more than 10 ciders, reports that sales are overtaking premium domestic and premium international beer in terms of percentage growth. "Cider has been growing for a few years, but the rate of growth is really starting to accelerate," the company's Dan Holland says.

CUB research shows that more than half of cider drinkers are in their 20s and 30s. Surprisingly, it also showed 59 per cent of cider drinkers were male. "A couple of years ago, you would see it in a few bottle shops and there would be a few people drinking it at parties but now, more often than not, you walk into a bar and there will be an English-style cider on tap," Mr Holland said.

David Hynes, the owner of Collingwood's Provenance, started Cider Sundays in December. "From day one, we got the hard-core cider drinkers, and since then it's just more and more people becoming interested." The venue now has 15 ciders on its list.

Lisa Cresswell, of Seven Oaks orchard in Merricks North, studied at a cider academy in England, where she says the drink is wildly popular.

"Pubs have it on tap and people drink it like beer and wine," she says.

"Australia has been slow to realise how good it is, but we are catching up now.

"Lots more more people are interested, and not just in the Strongbow, mainstream stuff, but in the more handcrafted quality products."