



# Hosting Cask Ale Events

Practical Strategies for Successful  
Homebrew Cask

by

**Randy Baril**

Head Cellarman, Cask-conditioned Ale Support Campaign (CASC),  
organizers of the New England Real Ale eXhibition (NERAX)

# About your Speaker

Head Cellarman of the longest-running real ale festival in the country since 2010, cellaring 9 festivals of over 60 firkins in that time.



Tasted over 1,000 samples of cask ale over this time.

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# About your Speaker

Went to the Great British Beer Festival (GBBF) in 2011 to attend CAMRA's Bar Manager Training, a prerequisite for running a bar at any of their festivals.



# About your Speaker

Homebrewer for over 15 years with loads of practical experience.

Organized my own May Day Cask Festival among many other homebrew cask appearances.



# So, what is Cask Ale?

Beer served at cellar temperature (48-54°F) with 1.1 to 1.3 dissolved volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>.

It must be served mechanically without the aid of compressed gasses to push it to the point of dispense.

**CAMRA** says

"Real ale is a natural product brewed using traditional ingredients and left to mature in the cask (container) from which it is served"

Also a bit warmer, 11-13 °C, which is 52-57 °F



# But, what *is* Cask Ale

Beer served a bit warmer than usual with a little less carbonation, usually out of a handpump or directly out of a cask via a tap.

- More flavorful or malt-forward
- Less fizzy, sparkly on the palette
- Less aromatic? Less *aggressively* aromatic
- More subtle
- Well suited to maximize flavor components in lower-alcohol beer



# What about Real Ale?

Any beer (ale or lager, despite the name) that has undergone a secondary fermentation in a sealed vessel.

Your homebrew is Real Ale when bottle or keg conditioned!



# Kinds of Vessels that Serve Cask Ale



All have some way to allow gas in the top as the liquid comes out.

Exception: Polypins! They collapse.





# Two Ways to Serve

## Gravity

Letting the beer fall out of the vessel into a conveniently placed glass.



## Beer Engine

Pulling the beer out of the vessel and pumping it into your glass.



# Basic Principles of Caring for Cask

- Temperature (48-54°F)
- Carbonation
- Clarity
- Flavor
- Time



# Strategies for Controlling Temperature

- Keep the beer in a cool environment



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- Keep the beer in a cool environment
- Evaporative Cooling



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- Insulate around the beer to create micro-climate



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# Strategies for Controlling Temperature

- Keep the beer in a cool environment
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- Insulate around the beer to create micro-climate
- Ice Blanketing



# Strategies for Controlling Temperature

- Keep the beer in a cool environment
- Evaporative Cooling
- Insulate around the beer to create micro-climate
- Ice Blanketing
- Cooling system

– External

– Internal



# Strategies for Controlling Carbonation

also referred to as “condition”

- Control temperature
- Vent as early as possible
- Manage venting port properly
- Take corrective action

*\*if necessary\**

Dissolved Volumes of CO <sub>2</sub> Present after Fermentation	
Temperature °F (°C)	Volumes CO <sub>2</sub>
47 °F (8.33 °C)	1.21
50 °F (10.0 °C)	1.15
53 °F (11.7 °C)	1.09
56 °F (13.3 °C)	1.04
59 °F (15.0 °C)	0.99
62 °F (16.7 °C)	0.94
65 °F (18.3 °C)	0.89

**Once CO<sub>2</sub> is gone, flat beer is forever.**





# Strategies for Controlling Clarity

- Stillage as far in advance as practical
- Control for temperature & carbonation
- Encourage use of finings when filling
- Add finings when venting (if known to lack them)
- Serve vertically (to chase down bright beer)
- Allow more time to settle
- Remove cloudy beer



# Strategies for Controlling Flavor

As a cellarman, you have no control over the actual flavor of the beer. Your job is to control the temperature, carbonation, and clarity of the beer to the best of your abilities to maximize the flavors of the beer entrusted to you.

- Don't contaminate the beer
- Monitor the flavor over time
- Don't serve beer that isn't ready or is too old



# Strategies for Controlling Time

Get one of these:

You can't control time; just keep it in mind as one of the variables you are working with.



# Basic Principles of Caring for Cask

- Temperature (48-54°F)
- Carbonation
- Clarity
- Flavor
- Time



# How About Some Practical Examples?

EBOMN

- Lots of Time
- Classic Gravity Service Technique

NEPABF

- 1 Hour Setup, 3 Hour Service, Out
- Rack-Bright Gravity Service

EBF

- Short Setup, Two Day Event
- Vertical Service with CaskWidge & Engines



# How About Some Practical Examples?

MDCF

- 1 Hour Setup, 4 Hour Service, Out
- Blended Service, Some Rack-Bright

NERAX

- 4 Day Festival with Lots of Time
- Traditional UK Cask Model



# East Boston Open Mic Night



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# East Boston Open Mic Night

- Private Room with Small Bar
  - Setup Beer 2 Days in Advance
  - Cooled with Ice Blankets & Evaporative Cooling
  - Vented 1 Day in Advance
  - Tapped the Morning of the Event
  - Leftover beer lasted 2 more days (Vanilla Stout) before being consumed



# New England Pro-Am Beer Festival



# New England Pro-Am Beer Festival

- Beer Racked Bright that Morning
  - Already cold, left sediment behind, some O<sub>2</sub> mixing
- Simple Setup
  - Cradle
  - Vent
  - Tap
  - Cover





# Extreme Beer Festival



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# Extreme Beer Festival

- Beer & Bar Delivered to Site Three Hours before Festival Open
  - Ice Beer
  - Build Bar
  - Tap/Vent Beer
  - Install Beer Engines
  - Draw Beer & Test







# May Day Cask Festival





# May Day Cask Festival

- Blend of Gravity & Engine Service
  - This year Gravity Station separate from Engine
- Some Rack-Bright, Some Pre-Settled
  - AM access to venue, late-arriving beer
- Cooling System “powered” by ice & pump
  - Pump moves cold liquid
  - Manifold distributes and collects
  - Saddles create cooler zone



# New England Real Ale eXhibition



Celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> festival next Spring!

6-9 April 2016

South Boston Lithuanian Club

[www.nerax.org](http://www.nerax.org)



# New England Real Ale eXhibition

- Basic unit is a Bay of Stillage, 8' Frontage with 3 levels of 5 Firkins each, 10 Gravity, 5 Engine plus 0-3 Verticals and the occasional Bar-top Special for potential service of 19 different beers!
- Classic is 5 Bay, November is 3 Bay
- Three electric glycol-mix chillers



# New England Real Ale eXhibition

- Blend of Gravity & Engine Service
- No Rack-Bright; All Settled on Site
  - Some US firkins pre-fined before loading
  - With few exceptions, UK beer fined with isinglass
- Beer is rotated on to stillage mid-festival
  - Determined by demand
  - Staged & pre-vented as possible
  - Must consider what beer to hold back and which to serve



# A few other examples

- Home w/ igloo ice reservoir, single pin
- Linztoberfest (RB single w/ ice blanket)
- Casktoberfest (environment w/ gas blanket)
- MDCF 2014 @ John Harvard's Brew Pub
  - Used ice well for cold plate to chill reservoir
- GBBF 2011 (cold environment)
- Craft Brewer's Conference 2010
  - Rack Bright on a Massive Scale



# So, How Can You Do Cask?

1. Make Real Ale

2. Start Small

- 5L Mini Kegs are decent
- Tilted corny kegs is silly but **does** work
- Share around a pin or engine & 'kit'

3. Go Big

- Invest in Cooperage, Engines, Taps
- Build up your local community



# How to Prime Cask Ale

Fermentation Temperature (°F/°C)	Volumes of CO <sub>2</sub>
47 °F (8.33 °C)	1.21
50 °F (10.0 °C)	1.15
53 °F (11.7 °C)	1.09
56 °F (13.3 °C)	1.04
59 °F (15.0 °C)	0.988
62 °F (16.7 °C)	0.940
65 °F (18.3 °C)	0.894
68 °F (20.0 °C)	0.850
71 °F (21.7 °C)	0.807
74 °F (23.3 °C)	0.767
77 °F (25.0 °C)	0.728
80 °F (26.7 °C)	0.691
83 °F (28.3 °C)	0.655

1. It is best to fill the cask with beer racked out of the fermenter once the beer to hit final gravity. Cold-crashing is OK, but use the fermentation temperature for the charts below.
2. Determine how much priming sugar you need:  
$$1.4 - \text{Residual CO}_2 = \text{Required CO}_2$$
3. Calculate the amount of dextrose you need:  
$$\text{Dextrose(oz)} = .59 * \text{ReqCO}_2 * \text{Vol(Gal)}$$
4. Sanitize the required dextrose by boiling for 2 minutes in small amount of water. Add to cask while racking beer.
5. Any fermentable can be used to prime the beer. Calculate the equivalency to the required ounces of dextrose.





# Start Small

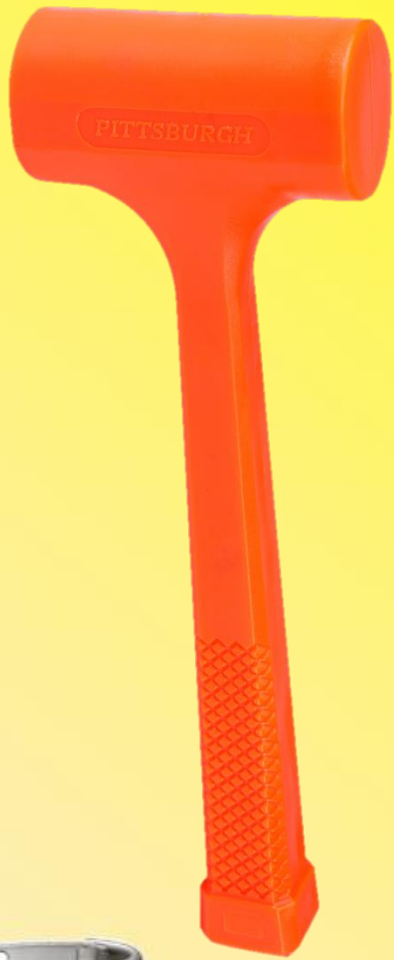
- 5L Mini Keg w/ Spiles. Built-in tap limits life.



- Try the Polypin option, but know limitations.
  - Basic gear: Pin, keystone, shive, hard spile, deadblow hammer, gravity tap, chocks



# Start Small



# Go Big

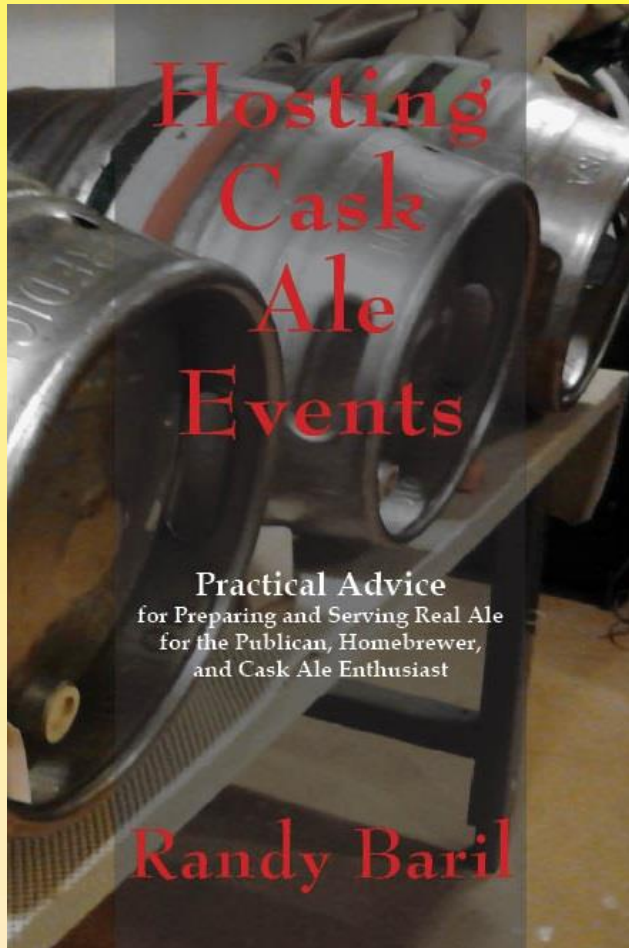
I am organizing special Group Buy for the following:

- Pins & firkins
- England Worthside Limited (EWL) beer engines
- Gravity taps, straight taps, CaskWidge

For more info, visit [www.homebrewcask.com](http://www.homebrewcask.com)



# Want to Learn More?



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