

THE RUM RANGE

As the cane-based spirits' market share grows, so does the plethora of sub-categories, flavors and niche offerings.

by **Gregg Glaser**



Like so many categories of spirits, the news for rum is the growth in premium and super premiums. Only vodka, the leading spirit sold in the U.S., outsells rum. However, vodka should watch its market share, says Dori Bryant of Polished Palate, a company that holds spirits' tastings in major cities across the country. "I have seen over and over again how interested people become with rum once they have a sip, especially the finer varieties. Rum spoils them." Malcolm Gosling, president of Gosling's Export (Bermuda) Ltd., a family distiller, agrees. He expects rum "to trend upward to 2015."

According to Rums of Puerto Rico, rum has the second highest market share — 12.9 percent — for all spirits sold in the U.S. This translates to 25 million nine-liter cases of rum sold here each year (Adams' estimate for 2006 sales was slightly less, at 22.8 million cases.) With rum being the fastest growing spirit category, these figures should make Puerto Rican rum distillers shout "Salud!", because they sell about 70 percent of all rum sold in the U.S. The leading worldwide brand, Bacardi, has a lot to do with that.

RUM VS. RHUM

Columbus brought the first sugar cane to the West Indies in 1493, and that region remains a major producer of rum, but there are rum distilleries throughout the world. These distilleries either grow their own sugar cane or they purchase molasses, the by-product of the industrial sugar-making process and the basis for most rum. Even Puerto Rico, a major rum distilling nation, buys its molasses from offshore. The island's economy has become more industrial than agricultural, and not nearly enough sugar cane is grown there any longer.

This brings up the difference between Rum and Rhum — that pesky 'h' is an important little letter. Most rum in the world — probably 96 percent — is distilled from molasses. This is sometimes referred to as "industrial rum," although many rum distillers might not like that term, believing it to be a pejorative. That's not the case. Wonderful rums are made this way.

When the 'h' is added, the rum distillers are ecstatic to point out that their rhums are "agricultural" rhums. Or "agricole," the French word, just as "rhum" is the French spelling. What the "agricultural" rum dis-

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*Source: Rums of Puerto Rico

tillers are promoting to differentiate their products is that instead of using molasses, they press the juice directly from freshly harvested sugar cane — sometimes special single varieties of cane — and distill this juice.

Like such products as Rhum Clement and Rhum Barbancourt, these distilleries compare their rum making process more to wine making, in that rum is only produced from the harvest (instead of year-round), is estate grown and distilled, uses a special sugar cane, and is made in small batches. It's a great selling point for the super premium category and the customers who have gone to the trouble to learn about it, or who have attended a tasting where they have been introduced to "rhum agricole."

Is one better than the other? That comes down to personal taste.

One of these agricultural rums, without the "h", is 10 Cane, in the U.S. for only 2-1/2 years and a product of Moët Hennessy USA. 10 Cane's Rob Bryans said with this brand the idea is to "elevate the entire rum category with high-end luxury rum. It's a huge educational job in shifting the mindset of people so rum is considered sexy and cool."

10 Cane comes from the Caribbean island of Trinidad (with a history of many French settlers), and the marketing stresses that 10 Cane is different from other rums because only 100 percent pure cane juice is distilled and only 70 percent of the juice — the best juice, they say — from the first pressing is distilled. In addition, the rest of the process is steeped in all things French: French pot stills, a French distiller and French oak for aging. "We want the taste of light, fresh rum, true to the taste of the sugar cane," Bryans said.

10 Cane is promoted with nationwide sampling events that include a small cane juice press set up at on-premise locations where customers can press the cane them-

selves. The brand is also working with bartenders to encourage the mixing of classic rum drinks, and with chefs to pair rum drinks with food.

Depaz Blue Cane Amber Rhum, from Martinique in the French West Indies, definitely uses the "h." This agricole rhum is produced on the Chateau Depaz family estate, exclusively with blue cane. A product from Kobrand, that company's VP, director of spirits, Tom Congdon, said that blue cane, a variety that is in short supply, will become more important in the rum category in the coming years.

"Customers have started to dabble in super premium rums because of press attention," Congdon said. "They're seeing options and they're interested, but they're not yet committed to changing their rum drinking patterns."

Congdon said that Kobrand's policy is to look for "authentic family products that are the best of their region. We don't want to create a product out of a concept. We think the consumer is smarter than that and wants authenticity." With Depaz, Congdon said there's "a cachet and a flavor profile linked to the limited-estate production." The brand even holds a French Appellation d'Origine Controlée designation.

Only in the U.S. since June of last year, initially in New York City and Miami, Depaz has received positive press attention and reviews and will be in ten markets by the end of the year. The marketing campaign is focused on word-of-mouth and on-premise tastings. Kobrand is also working with Contemporary Cocktails, Inc., a consortium of bar chefs across the country, to create special Depaz cocktails such as the Depaz Summer Sun. The brand is accompanied by Depaz Cane Syrup, which is used in cocktails and baked goods such as Depaz Rhum cake and Depaz chocolate truffles.

GOING DARK: THE GROWTH OF AGED RUMS

“People are awakening to aged rums,” according to Dori Bryant. “It’s actually refreshing to see people’s eyes pop open when they taste Vizcaya VXOP Cask 21, Tortuga 5 and 12, Diplomatico, Santa Teresa 1796, (Ron) Botran Solera and Ron Zacapa 23 years.”

These are just a few of the many aged rums on the U.S. market. In Jamaica, Appleton Estate introduced its Reserve Jamaica Rum earlier this year. Created by Appleton Estate Master Blender Joy Spence (the industry’s first female master blender), Reserve is a blend of 20 rums. Since its original release in Jamaica in 2002, Reserve has received many international awards. The Appleton Estate portfolio also includes Appleton Estate VX (the flagship), Appleton Estate Extra, Appleton Estate 21 Year Old (a rare and expensive rum), Appleton Gold Special Rum and Appleton White Rum.

Another great Jamaican rum in the U.S. market is Jack Tar Superior Jamaican Dark Rum, which recently received a “Recommended” accolade from the Beverage Tasting Institute. The oversized bottle presents great potential for the off-premise sector and is also a great mixing rum for on-premise accounts that have customers looking for a sweeter, dark rum.

Robert Collins, managing director of Flor de Caña, from Nicaragua, said that even though his biggest seller is the 4 year-old Gold, the big push in the U.S. is with the 7 year-old Grand Reserva as Flor de Caña’s flagship rum in the premium category.

“We’ve been actively developing our

brands for seven years with an international division based in Miami,” Collins said, positioning our rums as high-quality aged rums — the single malts of the rum category.” Flor de Caña’s rums are 100 percent age-stated on the label, Collins said, “not a blend like others.” The marketing campaign in the U.S. uses the catchy term “Florplay” to introduce the brand. Other Flor de Caña rums include 4 year-old Extra Lite, 4 year-old Extra Dry, 5 year-old Black Label, 12 year-old Centenario, 18 year-old Centenario Gold and the 21 year-old Commemorative Edition.

Gosling’s Old Rum accompanies the seven-generation-old Bermuda distiller’s Black Seal Rum and Gold Rum in the U.S. Malcolm Gosling said that once his firm decided to put the “correct” efforts into marketing their rums in the U.S. three years ago, the focus was on aged rum. “We saw that the consumer was experimenting with new product entries in this category,” Gosling said. The distiller decided to become a player in the U.S.

“Our best sales tool is the taste in the bottle,” Gosling said. The distiller is also advertising in Bon Appetit to emphasize the culinary aspects of rum, and is offering tasting opportunities through the sponsorship of sports and social events such as football (Gillette Stadium), golf (LPGA, PGA, Champions Tour), sailing (numerous regattas on the East Coast and West Coast and even Colorado), rugby (USA 7’s), Nascar (Ginn, Pocono 500), book tours, theatre (Hasty Pudding) and the Bon Appetit Celebrity Chef Events in Beaver Creek, CO, Scottsdale, AZ, Las Vegas, NV and Test Kitchen in New York City.

Gosling’s is sold in all 50 states and Gosling said the company’s signature cocktail, Dark & Stormy, “has been a great vehicle for Gosling’s to give people the

taste of Bermuda. We’re selling the Bermuda lifestyle.”

Other aged rums, among a long list, include several from Bacardi (Reserva, 5, 8, Reserva Limitada); Ron del Barrilito’s 2 Star and 3 Star; Don Q Añejo and Grand Añejo from the Serralles distillery (all from Puerto Rico); Mount Gay Extra Old, a rum aged for 17 years; Captain Morgan Private Stock and Pyrat Rum XO Reserve.

NEW ON THE SCENE

Launched last February with the roll-out finished in early May, Tommy Bahama Rum from Barbados, imported by Sidney Frank Importing Co., is practically brand new in the U.S. The two brands are Tommy Bahama White Sand (a clear rum aged a minimum of two years) and Tommy Bahama Golden Sun (an amber rum which is a blend of rums aged three years).

Lee Einsidler, CEO of Sidney Frank Importing Co., said he sees “explosive growth potential with white rum and ultra-premium profits for retailers.” The Tommy Bahama brands are being advertised in many national magazines year-round (Cigar Aficionado, Conde Nast Traveler, Forbes, Food and Wine, GQ, Golf, Gourmet, Men’s Journal, New Yorker, Vanity Fair, Winding Road, Wine Spectator) with the tag line “Taste Paradise.” These ads will feature cocktail recipes that will tell consumers how to drink an ultra-premium rum in ultra-premium cocktails. One such signature drink is the Tommytini, a martini made with rum.

Another fairly recent introduction in the U.S. is Starr African Rum, here for just two and a half years. Jeffrey Zarnow, a former filmmaker, is the importer. He tasted the product and left the film business. Designed for export from an established



A sampling of rums, reflecting a broader range of choices.

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1920’s distillery in Mauritius, an African island, Zarnow said sales of Starr African Rum more than doubled last year. The rum is currently sold in eight states.

“Our main point to differentiate us,” Zarnow said, “is that this is an African rum, not Caribbean, Central or South American, which is bottled in a unique African-made bottle.” This bottle, with a sleek pyramid shape, is a major selling point for the brand. “People see this bottle and they want it for their home bars or to give to friends,” Zarnow said.

Also joining the new rum wave is the ultra-premium Bambu, launched into the category in March 2005. As of July of this year, Bambu has a new package, including a pink label and tapered French bottle, which is more true to its strategy as the first rum designed for women. Bambu uses the most advanced distillation and filtration techniques in order to produce light bodied, pure rum with virtually no after-taste. It is hand-crafted in small batches, thus production is highly limited.

FLAVORED RUMS

The other news with rum is the introduction of flavored rums. There’s a simple reason for this and the word is vodka.

William Ramos of Bacardi said that competing with flavored vodka is the reason Bacardi got into this market. “When Bacardi launched Bacardi Limón it was giving the consumer a rum that offered more flavor than vodka,” Ramos said. “Therefore it created a product that provided more balance when it came to flavor, sugar, acids and alcohol.”

Bacardi now has Peach Red, released in May, in addition to Limón (launched in 1995), Bacardi O (Orange flavored), Bacardi Coco (Coconut flavored), Bacardi Razz (Raspberry flavored), Bacardi Big Apple and Bacardi Gran Melon.

Brinley Gold Rum from the West Indies has a wide array of flavors in its line. The portfolio includes Vanilla, Mango, Coffee, Coconut and Lime, which is the most recent addition to the Brinley Gold Rum line of flavors.

Malibu is another big player with flavored rums, with Malibu Original Coconut since 1980, Malibu Pineapple, Malibu Mango, Malibu Passion Fruit and the 2007 addition to the brand, Malibu Tropical Banana.

Jeff Agdern, marketing VP for Malibu at Pernod Ricard USA, said the launch of Malibu Tropical Banana has been supported with a multi-million dollar marketing campaign including national TV, print and radio, and a wide range of consumer promotions and samplings over the summer. Also, a range of Caribbean-inspired cocktails has been developed by bartenders using Malibu Tropical Banana, such as Malibu Tropical Sunrise, Malibu Green Monkey and Malibu Slippery Banana. Malibu also brought out new packaging for the entire Malibu line earlier this year.

In addition to its other rums, Flor de Caña also sells 4 year-old Limón. The Don Q brand from Serralles has Don Q Limon Citrus Rum. Cruzan Rum Distillery in St. Croix offers consumers 8 tropical flavors to choose from. And, Caribaya, an imported Caribbean rum, has four flavors in its line — Spiced, Coconut, Mango and Pineapple — in addition to a light and dark rum.

The rum category has also benefitted, of course, from the huge popularity of the mojito, a classic cocktail that screams for rum. “Mojitos have become so popular that if a bar doesn’t currently serve a mojito, they will soon,” Bryant said. She even mentioned a bar in Tampa, FL, Gaspar’s Grotto, that grows its own mint behind the restaurant for patrons to select for their mojito. Now, there’s a good way to increase your rum sales. ■

BRINLEY GOLD RUM

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Mango
Coffee
Coconut
Lime

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