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LONDON DRINKER

Produced by the London branches of the Campaign for Real Ale Ltd

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Through the Roof - The Facts

For years we have said that the beer prices in London are far too high. Now we can prove it. Recently the West London branch of CAMRA carried out a price survey of pubs which they had checked previously in December 1979. What they found is analysed by **Roger Warhurst**.

A SAMPLE OF pubs was drawn from within a sector of West London from the West End through Kensington, Chelsea, Fulham, Hammersmith and Chiswick to Acton. Tied and free trade, tenanted and managed pubs were all included. The majority of the pubs surveyed were those shortlisted for inclusion in the 1983

Good Beer Guide, with a number of random additions to provide a full cross section of brewers. Notoriously high priced pubs which may have distorted the picture have been excluded, so the prices quoted represent a reasonable average of those charged throughout the West London sector.

Tied Houses

The saloon bar prices charged in tied houses controlled by the 8 major London brewers (93% of Greater London pubs) were compared. Table 1 compares prices charged for cask conditioned beers in December 1979 with those charged in June 1982.

Table 1 Comparison of prices in tied houses Dec. '79 - June '82.

BEERS	O.G.	Average price per pint (pence)		% increase	Price per O.G. (Pence)
		Dec. '79	June '82		
	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)
MILDS (O.G. 1030 - 1032)					
Young BMA	1030	36	54	50	1.80
Truman Prize Mild	1034	—	69.5	—	2.04
ORDINARY BITTERS (O.G. 1035 - 1039)					
Fuller Chiswick Bitter	1035.5	39.3*	61.6	56.7	1.74
Truman Bitter	1036	—	72.3	—	2.01
Young Bitter	1036	40.9	62.6	53.1	1.74
Wethered Bitter	1036.6	43.3	67	54.7	1.83
Allied Bitters (Benskin etc.)	1037	41.5*	64.8	56.1	1.75
Watney London Bitter	1037.5	45	68.7	52.7	1.83
Courage Best Bitter	1039	45	67	48.9	1.72
Charrington IPA	1039.5	42.6	67.4	58	1.70
Average	1037.1	42.5	66.4	56.2	1.79
PREMIUM BITTERS (O.G. 1040 - 1047)					
Fuller London Pride	1041.5	42.8	67	56.6	1.61
Bass	1044	44.8	74.2	65.6	1.69
Watney Stag Bitter	1044	48.5	75	54.6	1.70
Truman Best Bitter	1045	—	73.7	—	1.64
Courage Directors	1046	50.6	74.7	47.6	1.62
Fremlin Tusker	1046	47.5	72	56.5	1.56
Young Special	1046	44	69	56.8	1.50
Ind Coope Burton Ale	1047.5	48.3	71	47	1.49
Average	1045	46.6	72.1	54.7	1.60
STRONG BITTERS (O.G. 1048 - 56)					
Fuller ESB	1055.75	48.5	75.5	55.9	1.35

N.B. * Price for Fuller Bitter; Chiswick Bitter not available at the time.

* Price for Ind Coope (Romford) Bitter.

Give us back our 9p!

As can be seen from the Table, the average price of a pint of ordinary bitter in the saloon bar of a West London tied house is now 66½p compared with 42½p just 2½ years ago. Premium bitter

now costs 72p on average, compared with 46½p two and a half years ago. Prices for ordinary and premium bitters have risen on average 56% over that period. This compares unfavourably with national figures showing price rises generally of

36% for all items and 47% for all alcoholic drinks over a similar period. Average earnings have increased by 43%, and manual workers wages by only 35% over the same period. (Source: *Monthly Digest of Statistics* - HMSO)

Putting it simply, if beer prices had merely kept pace with prices generally and basic wage rates, we would be paying on average 9p less per pint. Increased excise duty on beer imposed in three successive budgets over the period accounts for 5½p of this amount, which leaves 3½p per pint unexplained. It is hard to escape the conclusion that, as CAMRA has often pointed out, we are being asked to pay proportionally more for a pint today compared with 1979 in order to maintain the profit margins of the brewers and publicans at a time of falling beer consumption.

Value for money

Which beers offer the best value for money? The relationship between retail price and strength of

beers is complex since the price of a pint also reflects various fixed costs such as labour, plant and transport which do not vary significantly according to how strong the beer is. Nevertheless a rough relationship can be derived by dividing the retail price by the alcoholic strength as represented by the original gravity of the beer — column (c) of Table 1 by Column (a).

The results are given in Column (c). In general the strong and premium bitters are better value than the ordinary bitters and milds. You pay on average 1.60p per O.G. for premium bitter as compared with 1.79p per O.G. for ordinary bitter. Best value of all is the extra strong Fuller's ESB at 1.35p. Best value amongst the premium bitters are Ind Coope Burton Ale at 1.49p and Young's Special at 1.50p. Top value ordinary bitters are Charrington's IPA at 1.70p and Courage Best Bitter at 1.72p. Young's Mild far outstrips the new Truman Mild in terms of value for money.

Table 2 Sample Free House prices - June '82

BEERS	O.G.	Price (p)
WEAK BITTERS (O.G. 1030 - 1034)		
Ruddle Bitter	1032	67
Eldridge Pope Dorchester Bitter	1032.5	69
King & Barnes Sussex Bitter	1034.9	65
Average	1033.1	67
ORDINARY BITTERS (O.G. 1035 - 1039)		
Greene King IPA	1035	69
Wells Bitter	1035	70
Adnam Bitter	1036	68
Shepherd Neame Bitter	1036	69
Gale BBB	1037	68
Arnell BBB	1038.5	69
Average	1036.3	68.8
PREMIUM BITTERS (O.G. 1040 - 1047)		
Ringwood Bitter	1040	69
Felfinfoel Double Dragon	1040	73
Sam Smith OBB	1040.9	74.3
Everard Tiger	1041	72
Fuller London Pride	1041.5	68
Devenish Wessex Bitter	1042	74
Brakspear Special Bitter	1042	70
Courage Directors	1046	75
Young Special	1046	77
Ind Coope Burton Ale	1047.5	75
Average	1042.8	72.7
STRONG BITTERS (O.G. 1048 - 1056)		
Greene King Abbot	1048	78
Eldridge Pope Royal O & K	1048	75.5
Ruddle County	1050	82
Fuller ESB	1055.75	78
Average	1050.4	78.4

