

## **Bock Beers**

Are you ready for a strong, dark, malty lager? Then a Bock beer is just what you're looking for. Late winter and Fall are the traditional seasons for bocks, but there are quite a selection of them now available year round. Take it from me, an ale drinker, when I reach for a lager, I reach for a bock!

### *Which Came First, the Beer or the Goat? -*

Bock beers are German in origin, having first been brewed in the northern German city of Einbeck sometime during the 14th century. The name Bock actually comes from a corruption of the name Einbeck that the beer style was labeled with when it migrated to Munich during the 17th century. Today, Munich is home to many great Bock beers. The German word for Billy-goat is also "bock," so Bock beers have adopted the Billy-goat as their official symbol.

### *Wives Tail -*

Bocks were traditionally brewed at the end of the brewing season (late winter or early spring), so they were the last beer of the season to be brewed. (Before refrigeration, brewing season ended once the temperatures got too high for brewers to keep yeast.) For this reason, many people believe that Bock beers are from the "bottom" of the brewing tank, or that they are the leftover sediment from other brews. Of course, this is not the case in modern brewing (I won't vouch for the way they might have brewed beer in centuries past!). Bocks brewed in the late winter or early spring were stored (or "lagered") for about six months, making them available to drink come the fall.

### *Not A Bock?*

Bock beers are bottom fermented lagers, which means that they are brewed at relatively cool temperatures with yeast that has been developed to be active at those temperatures. Rogue Ales in Newport, Oregon, has to be just a little different in almost everything they do, however. They brew a great beer called **Dead Guy Ale** that they call a Bock. What's wrong with that picture? An ale is not a lager, and bocks are most definitely lagers!

How do they do it? Rogue brewer John Maier uses Rogue's own PacMan yeast, which is an ale yeast. But with it, he brews a Maibock lager. Turns out that PacMan yeast works well at the lower lager temperature range. So while the label says "Dead Guy Ale," you're really drinking a Maibock (or "Maier" Bock) lager.

There are also a few beers called "**Weizenbocks**," which are not really bocks at all. For example, Flying Dog makes a great beer called **Wild Dog Weizenbock**. The term "bock" is used here to describe the strong nature of the beer, and does not imply that the beer is a traditional bock beer. At different times in history, the term "bock" also was used to refer to relatively strong beers and this is a modern day example of that same practice.

## *Holy Beer -*

Munich played a vital role in the development of Bock beers due to the influence of the many monastic orders living in the area (the name "Munich" is derived from the German word for monk). During Lent, the forty days prior to Easter, fasting is common, but beer is brewed from ingredients that are not prohibited during Lent, so Bock beer became a popular source of sustenance during the Lenten season.

Being great brewers, monks also lent their names to many breweries. The Paulaner Brewery (Munich) is named for the Pauline monks, while the Franziskaner Brewery (also Munich) was named for the Franciscan monks. Today you can still see a monk on the label of Franziskaner beers, though the Bock beer comes from their parent brewer, Spaten.

## **Traditional Bocks**

Just as with other beers, there are a variety of different Bock styles. At its core, the **Traditional Bock** is a bottom fermented lager, brewed to a strength of at least 6% alcohol by volume (abv). Bocks are strong, dark, malty beers! Traditional Bocks are a bit sweet since a lot of malt grain is used, but they are well attenuated (meaning that most of the malt sugar has been converted to alcohol and carbon dioxide), so they are not overly sweet. Most importantly, the flavor of the malt should shine through and traditionally, Vienna and Munich malts are used, giving the beer a toasty flavor. There is not much hop bitterness and Bocks should not taste roasted or burnt. **Spaten Bock** is a great example of this style, but some American micro-brewers also make solid bock beers, like **Flying Dog Heller Hound** or **Anchor Bock**.

## **Maibocks**

The **Maibock** or **Helles Bock** is the "lightest" version of the Bock style. These beers still get into the 6% plus abv range, but they are not quite as complex and intense in malt character as the Traditional Bocks. **Maibocks** (or "May Bocks") are often thought of as Spring fest types of beer and are a more recent development in the Bock family than the other styles. They can be a little bit hoppier (bitter) and are still rich in malt flavor, but not so much as other Bock beers.

## **Doppelbocks**

The **Doppelbock** is a very popular style and beers in this style rate as the strongest lager beers in the world. The famous **Samichlaus** beer from Austria (formerly brewed in Switzerland) reaches 14% abv and most other **Doppelbocks** get to be well over 7% abv. While these are excellent beers, DO NOT drink them on an empty stomach! Fortunately, **Doppelbocks** like **Spaten Optimator**, **Ayinger Celebrator**, **Paulaner Salvator** and **Moretti La Rossa** are great companions with all sorts of foods (see **Cuisine** below). Bell's Brewery makes an excellent Doppelbock in Michigan and they call theirs **Consecrator**.

While you're reading about **Doppelbocks**, you might notice that most of the Doppelbock names end in the letters "a-t-o-r," which is quite intentional and traditional. Paulaner **Salvator** is viewed as the "original" Doppelbock and many beers brewed later share the "a-t-o-r" in tribute to it, or to at least maintain the traditional ending.

The word **Salvator** means "Our Savior" in Latin and harks back to the Lenten origins of the beer and the monks who first brewed it. Pauline monks (of the order of St. Francis of Paula) originally from Calabria, Italy, established a community in Munich which is where they first started to sell Salvator commercially in the 18th century.

The word doppelbock literally means "double bock" and while today's doppelbocks are essentially twice the strength of regular bocks, the doppelbock style originated completely separate from the bock style. Prior to moving to Munich, the Pauline monks of Italy were already brewing the beer that Germans later referred to as a "doppelbock." In all likelihood, the original version of the beer that the Germans called "doppelbock" was somewhat different from the style of beer we know today and over time, it evolved to become the beer we know.

## **Eisbocks**

Last in the Bock family are **Eisbocks**. **Eisbocks** are literally, "ice Bocks." They are Doppelbocks which are frozen to concentrate the flavor and alcohol. During the freezing process, ice forms and is removed. Since the ice is pure water, removing it concentrates the other ingredients including the alcohol, making the **Eisbock** a very formidable beer indeed. From Austria, Brewery Eggenburg makes a terrific **Eisbock Dunkel**.

## *Cuisine -*



Bocks are typically strong, malty beers. Bocks are usually 6% alcohol by volume or higher, making them much stronger than the average beer. Some doppelbocks will go as high as 14%, so watch out! Dark in color, bocks are rich in flavor. They are malty, sweet and often taste of toasted grain. *Drink them in a pilsener or cylindrical glass.*

Bocks are excellent beers with food. Pairing them with German cuisine is a natural, but Bocks go great with red meat, barbecue, red sauced pastas, earthy cheeses like Camembert, or even chocolate!