

# The RARE BEER CLUB

## NEBRASKA BREWING COMPANY

### BARREL AGED RESERVE SERIES: MÉLANGE À TROIS

**Style:** Belgian-Style Strong Blonde Ale aged in Chardonnay barrels

**ABV:** 10% **Serving Temperature:** 45–54° F **Suggested Glassware:** Snifter, Tulip, Chalice, or Chardonnay Glass

We've got four very special limited releases from Nebraska Brewing Co. this go-round, with a focus on the exceptional work they're doing in their Barrel Aged Reserve Series. We'll kick things off with their Mélange à Trois—one of the most impressive beers we've sampled in a while. The Belgian-style blonde base pops with all kinds of complexity throughout: honeyed malts, round esters like cotton candy and fruit punch—plus fine-bubbled carbonation and a peppery yeast character that pokes in throughout to keep this beer fully focused. Influences from those French oak barrels (which previously held Chardonnay) are similarly expressive, manifesting as layered tree fruits, buttery oak, and vanilla. The 10% ABV never feels heavy, with the overall effect quite the opposite: zesty, well-bittered, crisp Belgian-style loveliness.

The initial pour is pretty magnificent, with a deep golden nectar for the bottom two-thirds. A well-formed white foam fills the top third proudly from the outset, then slowly subsides into something more manageable, leaving thick lacing on the sides of the glass. This is a brilliant-looking beer—a fitting start for everything that follows. Pepper and dough land at the top of the aromatics. Lemony acidity kicks in along the edges. It's all Belgian-blond profile at first, then the Chardonnay-barrel notes come rolling in: rounded and buttery and lemon custard-like. A squeeze of grapefruit lands near the perimeter of things, almost like a lemon wedge in form and function, as this beer heads out in all sorts of directions: breadly, fruity, and fresh.

The barrel's present and plush from the first sip. Endearingly buttery Chardonnay notes land at similar volume to a lifting influence of white pepper, clove, and zesty CO<sub>2</sub>. It feels like two contrary influences meeting; similar notes of honeycomb and chewy caramelized malts form a solid foundation, the peppery elements feel ideally textured, and then there's the additional levels that appear after things warm: almond and clove, hints of cinnamon and deeper spice, esters emerging as everything from cotton candy and fresh apple to headier, floral elements. And the remarkable thing, through all of it, is how endearing and drinkable Mélange à Trois stays despite its heft. This manages to feel both crisp and massive, buttery and streamlined, a testament to both good brewing and good barrels. It's been a long time since a beer this size disappeared so quickly in our offices. The sweet oak's memorable. The base beer's sublime.

**Agging & Pairing Notes:** This is bottle-conditioned and big enough to keep a steady course in the cellar for a while, though we suggest sampling a bottle every six months or so. The buttery-vanilla notes here suggest excellent pairing options with baked, flaky white fish, or even something in more of a dessert course, like a buttery-crust apple and rhubarb pie.

### BARREL AGED RESERVE SERIES: FATHEAD

**Style:** Barleywine-Style Ale, aged 6 months in Whiskey barrels

**ABV:** 12.1% **Serving Temperature:** 50–57° F **Suggested Glassware:** Snifter, Tulip, Small Nonic, or Pinot Glass

Switching gears from Chardonnay to whiskey barrels, we get to head into the darker styles of Nebraska's Barrel Aged Reserve Series. Fathead originally started as a strong Scotch-style ale, but it's since headed into territory most resembling a barley wine. Aged for six months inside of freshly emptied whiskey barrels, and tipping the scales at just over 12% ABV, Fathead still somehow avoids feeling top-heavy: with lean, warming alcohol and fresh fruit throughout.

Nebraska's whiskey-barrel-aged barley wine pours a deep, murky cola-brown, capped with a welcoming light-tan foam that's fine-bubbled and nicely formed for a beer this high in ABV. Resilient lacing coats the side of the glass. An expansive vein of vinous heat and dense fruit lands first, bringing along dates, figs, plums, and berries. Chewier notes of caramelized sugar and leather perfectly complement the fruity, warming approach. The expansive flavors build upon everything offered up by the aroma. The mouthfeel's more easier-going than expected: refreshing

(Continued on reverse)

## BARREL AGED RESERVE SERIES: FATHEAD (CONT'D)

levels of CO<sub>2</sub>, a welcome underlying bitterness, plus a nice edge of tannins contrast with the weighty mélange of caramelized sugars and dried fruit. Those additional notes from the whiskey barrels (heated and spicy, toasted and charred) play well alongside everything else. Fathead's hugely endearing—one of the most complex barrel-aged barley wines we've had in a while, with aromatics and flavors that just keep on going.

**Aging & Pairing Notes:** Bottle-conditioned and sturdy enough for extended cellaring—although delicious fresh. For us, that combination of caramel and ripe fruitiness calls for pairings involving roasted pork.

## BARREL AGED RESERVE SERIES: BLACK BETTY

**Style:** Imperial Stout, aged 6 months in fresh Whiskey barrels

**ABV:** 10.6% **Serving Temperature:** 52–59° F **Suggested Glassware:** Snifter, Tulip, Small Nonic, or Pinot Glass

Barrel-aged Black Betty seems the perfect way to cap just about any tasting. This hits much darker notes—chocolate, coffee, deep levels of roast—than the barrel-aged Fathead in this series, but it offers a similarly ideal match of unexpected smoothness and explorable depth. Which is all to say: We found this an immensely enjoyable beer to dig into and savor. This pours the deep and dark chocolate-brown color one might expect from the imperial-stout style—though with a surprising degree of lasting tan foam on top. Rich notes of cocoa powder, coffee, and toasted marshmallow fill out the aroma, feeling almost silky, with milk chocolate and mineral bitterness underneath. Exceptionally smooth, chocolate-driven aromatics lead, with sweet oak contributions and touches of caramelized sugars and spice from the whiskey's residual impact. The barrel contributions are seamlessly integrated throughout and provide substantial secondary character atop an already decadent stout.

So much of Black Betty's drinkability reminded us of creamy indulgences like North Coast's Old Rasputin, but this beer feels significantly more appointed: licorice and rich nuttiness are present from the first sip, playing out alongside familiar roast, bitter chocolate, and cocoa. It proves to be such a generous barrel-aged imperial stout, incorporating sweet vanilla and almond character from its time in whiskey barrels, as well as those spicier, burnt-caramel elements from the preceding whiskey. A perfect encapsulation of this Barrel Aged Reserve Series, combining a highly drinkable and decadent imperial stout with just the right amount of time spent in freshly emptied whiskey barrels. Impressively smooth big beer.

**Aging & Pairing Notes:** Black Betty's approaching 11% and bottle-conditioned, so don't be afraid to set some bottles in the cellar. But this is drinking smoothly as is—no additional aging required. The brewery suggests pairing with equally lush chocolate dessert. Alternatively, we'd be interested in sipping this alongside a pepper-crusted steak from the grill.

## BARREL AGED RESERVE SERIES: M.O.A.B. (MOTHER OF ALL BETTYS)

**Style:** Imperial Stout aged in Bourbon barrels

**ABV:** 13.7% **Serving Temperature:** 52–59° F **Suggested Glassware:** Snifter, Tulip, Small Nonic, or Pinot Glass

M.O.A.B. (Mother of All Bettys) is brewed with twice as much grain as Black Betty and gets double mashed and dosed with a significant amount of Warrior hops, all before heading into potent bourbon barrels. M.O.A.B. maintains the smooth drinkability of the original, but with everything turned up a few notches: deeper specialty maltiness and roast, potent earthy hop character, and slightly amped-up barrel impact make this one an absolute treat to dig into. This bourbon-barrel-aged imperial stout pours generally pitch-black with just a slight amount of cola-brown color around the edges. Lighter head formation than Black Betty, as this one's capped by modest, medium-tan foam. This leaves a bit of lacing behind, with a nice viscosity to this beer overall. M.O.A.B. offers up somewhat more coffee, roast, and darker chocolate than Black Betty, which leads more with its mellow, milk-chocolate components; this one's deeper and darker throughout. There's a decadent, hugely nuanced imperial stout at the core here—lots of roast and licorice, plus that warming, layered bourbon presence throughout.

Full mouthfeel, with a moderate underpinning of CO<sub>2</sub> and subtle impact of vinous warmth keeping things light on the palate. For how much layered chocolate and licorice and deep roast there is here, this is so nicely balanced and pleasant to dig into. M.O.A.B. accordingly amps up everything from Nebraska's Black Betty—significantly more malts, greater hops impact from a potent Warrior addition (giving subtle earth and pine), and more pronounced barrel influence (featuring caramel and burnt sugar)—but these sweet and bitter elements are ramped up in tandem, with everything keeping its balance. The delicious core stout offers up a ton of dark chocolate and licorice and roasted malts, while the bourbon influence provides a welcome edge alongside this beer's tucked-away alcohol. Exceptionally deep imperial stout, with lasting milk chocolate, caramel, and burnt sugars—still keeping its sweetness in check.

**Aging & Pairing Notes:** The potent ABV and dense construction suggest this should age gracefully for a number of years, though—like all four of the Nebraska Brewing beers in this special offer—this proves super smooth from the outset. M.O.A.B. will stand up to the heftiest of food pairings: steak, lamb kebabs, tri-tip, burnt ends... or works great for a side-by-side tasting with Black Betty.