



Romancing the Foam No. 92

It's snowed a couple inches and my friend and neighbor Larry is shoveling our walk. He is trying to lose weight and shoveling snow is less boring than the treadmill. Larry is moving down the street losing weight and spreading good will. He subscribes to Romancing the Foam and wants to know if there are any flavorful low calorie beers. There are.

A few brewers such as Deschutes, Flying Dog, New Belgium, Red Hook, Sam Adams and many of the majors (Miller Coors, Pabst, etc.) provide information on calories. Most craft brewers do not. John Michael Verive posted an article on the website Beer of Tomorrow about calories in beer (<http://www.beeroftomorrow.com/calories-in-craft-beer/>). Verive calculates a ballpark figure by multiplying the alcohol by volume by 2.5 times the number of ounces. For maltier beers he multiplies by 3 instead of 2.5.

For years craft brewers have challenged the diet conscious by dialing up the malt, alcohol and hops brewing ever bigger and bolder Doppel Bocks, Belgian Quads, Double IPAs, and Russian Imperial Stouts hitting up to 15% alcohol that can pack 540 calories in a 12 ounce pour – about the same calorie count as a Big Mac (550 calories). Within the past couple of years Craft brewers have started exploring full flavored low alcohol sours, session ales, milds and bitters with waist friendly calories counts from 90 to 149 for a 12 oz. pour, or the roughly equivalent of a large apple or a cup of sliced bananas.



Moderate to strong lactic sourness defines Berliner Weisse with mild citrus or tart apple flavors and traces of doughy wheat. It's made with half wheat malt and half pilsner malt and has no hop flavor. It's fermented with an ale yeast and *Lactobacillus* – the same bacteria used to make yogurt. Lactic acid has a softer or milder acidity than citric or acetic acid (vinegar) but the acid flavor lasts longer. Berliner Weisse may have a light *Brettanomyces* (British fungus) funk (barnyard or wet horse blanket) but it should not dominate. Berliner Weisse is generally not as acidic as a Belgian Lambic, not as funky and has lower alcohol.

I found Destihl Brewery's Counter ClockWeisse on tap at the Pig and Fiddle a couple of weeks ago. It's fermented bone dry and at 3% alcohol by volume (abv) a 12 ounce glass has about 90 calories. A slightly hazy straw gold pour produces a vigorous head that disappears with champagne-like quickness. It smells lemony tart and drinks like a highly carbonated unsweetened lemonade with a little wheat and malt character in the background to soften the edges somewhat. Counter ClockWeisse's puckering tartness and champagne-like

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effervescence makes a very refreshing companion for a long afternoon. I rate it 87.

Other low alcohol Berliner Weisses to try are Bells Oarsman Ale (4% abv), Bent Brewstillery Funked up Apricot Berliner Weisse (3.5% abv), Evil Twin Justin Blaeber (4.5% abv), Full Sail Brewer's Share Berliner Weiss (4% abv), New Holland Incorrigeable (4.9% abv), or Off Color Brewing Fierce (3.8% abv).

Gose originated sometime in the Middle Ages in Goslar located in lower Saxony (now Germany) on the Gose River. Brewers use the same grain for Gose as they use for Berliner Weisse but they brew Gose with a light dose of coriander and salt. Its acidity is a little milder than a Berliner Weisse – the salt and coriander tone it down a pinch – and its alcohol ranges from 4.2 to 4.8% abv. While losing favor in Goslar, by the mid-18th century the beer became popular in Leipzig. As the 20th century dawned, Leipzig boasted 80 Gose houses but two world wars and the dynamics of East German rule drove the style to oblivion with the last Gose house shuttering its doors in 1966. Gose revived in 1980 but it is probably easier to find in the US than Germany today.



At 4.3% abv, a 12 ounce pour of Excelsior Brewery's MinneGose clocks in at 129 calories. It pours bright straw gold with a very light haze under a 1" quickly dissipating white foam cap. Moderate lemon and wheat aromas rise from the glass with a trace of salt. Well-developed wheat flavors seasoned with a dose of salt balance lemon tartness with hints of pomme fruit. The wheat malt gives it a surprisingly creamy texture with a medium light body and medium high carbonation. It's very refreshing and easy to drink. I rate it 80 out of 100.

Other Gose to try include Lucid Brewing Company's Goslar, (4.1% abv), Ritterguts Gose (4.7% abv), Evil Twin Mission Gose, 4.0% abv, Stillwater Artisanal Ales Gose Gone Wild, 4.3% abv, Victory Kirsch Gose, 4.7% abv, and Widmer Brothers Marionberry Hibiscus Gose, 4% abv.

Two closely related styles to look for are Lichtenhainer and Piwo Grodziskie. Lichtenhainer is a sour smoked beer ranging from 3.5 to 4.7 abv and Piwo Grodziskie is made from oak smoked wheat malt with 2.5 to 3.3% abv. Grodziskie is not sour and the oak smoke is softer and less intense than the beechwood used in German Rauchbiers. Both are flavor packed and diet friendly.

Session beers are below 5% abv but are packed with flavor with a balance between malt and hops and a clean finish. You can drink several of these over a session without significantly undermining your ability



to return home in one piece after the session. The combination of low alcohol and big flavor makes session beers an ideal diet beer.



Brau Brothers Hopsession Super Pale Ale, an American Pale Ale, nails the Session beer style. At 4.2% abv a 12 ounce bottle contains around 126 calories. A bright gold pour kicks up a 1" clingy white foam cap that slowly recedes. Hops dominate the aromas with pine and mint supported by light biscuit. On the palate Hopsession attacks with big malt with a slight initial background sweetness that slowly fades to reveal an underlying dryness. As it warms melon and citrus notes come forward. Hopsession finishes with a pleasant lingering bitterness. Carbonation and body are medium. This is a standout - easy to drink, full flavored beer and definitely sessionable and it's hard to believe that this beer only has 4.2% abv.

Other session ales to try are Bent Brewstillery's Moar Scottish Session IPA (4.4% abv, 132 calories per 12 ounce can), Green Flash Brewing Company Citra Session IPA Hop Odyssey (4.5% abv, 135 calories per 12 ounce glass), Lakefront Brewery Extended Play India Session Ale (4.3% abv, 129 calories) and Northgate Brewing Get Together American Session IPA (4.2%

abv). Samuel Adams Belgian Session Ale (4.25% abv – 127.5 calories per bottle) presents big Belgian yeast flavors and a strong malt backbone.

British Bitters emerged from English pale ales as the 19th century drew to a close. British taxes based on the strength of the wort (unfermented beer) starting at the turn of the 20th century and increasing through two world wars – to save grain for food, reduce drunkenness and appease temperance advocates, drove down alcohol levels in beer to where the ordinarily bitter ended up with alcohol levels between 3.3 and 3.8% alcohol making bitter an ideal session beer.

Surly Bitter Brewer at 4% abv costs the weight conscious drinker a mere 120 calories per 12 ounce pour or 160 calories per 16 ounce can. Bitter Brewer pours lightly orange tinted amber under a 2" finely bubbled foam collar that slowly recedes and provides thick lace. Spicy, fresh mown grass aromas with a dose of orange rise from the glass. Grassy, citrusy flavors over biscuit, light toast and



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nuts lead to a slight astringency on the end. Surly adds oats to this beer making it creamy smooth with a medium body and carbonation. They have nailed the classic standard bitter and added slightly more aggressive hops. I rate it a 90. Surly releases its Mild – an English brown mild ale with 3.8% abv (112 calories per 12 ounce glass) in kegs every February. You will enjoy it for its big bready, toasty, nutty flavor with traces of malt spice.



In half an hour, a 185 lb. person burns 266 calories when shoveling snow or 532 calories an hour. For every hour Larry shovels snow he can drink nearly 6 (5.9) 12 ounce glasses of the Destihl CounterClock Weisse, 4 of the Excelsior MinneGose or the Brau Brothers Hopsession, or 4.43 of 12 ounce glasses of the Surly Bitter Brewer without gaining an ounce. By way of comparison, a Bud Light has 110 calories per 12-oz serving allowing an hour's worth of snow shoveling to burn off the calories in 4.8 servings. For those worried about the calorie difference between flavorful beer and Bud Light, hop on one foot for 1 minute for every 10 calorie difference.