



BREW

And the drinking's easy

A new season brings new horizons for beer lovers, writes **Willie Simpson**.

IS THE planet really warming up? Maybe someone should commission a scientist to chart beer consumption against rising temperatures. I reckon it would confirm that beer sales soar every summer as the mercury starts to climb.

Undoubtedly, megalitres of those new-fangled low-carbohydrate and lower-alcohol beers will disappear down throats this summer but so will plenty of full-flavoured yet "light-hearted" brews, which can effectively quench a thirst or wash down burnt offerings from the barbie.

And did someone mention cider?

Each summer seems to unearth a new blockbuster beer brand – last year's was Pure Blonde, no contest. And this year, a couple of beer makers have launched cider brands in time for the holiday season.

Pipsqueak Best Cider is a cleverly named newcomer from Western Australia's Little Creatures and is a step above the usual fizzy, sweet and bland mainstream ciders on offer. It's softly carbonated, actually tastes of apples and has a dry, slightly acidic finish; it will appeal to many non-beer drinkers as a good summer quaffer, especially served over ice. For more serious ciderphiles, Little Creatures is importing the more traditional English-style Aspall Suffolk Cyder.

Meanwhile, the Bluetongue brewery quietly tested its Tasmanian Devil cider at a handful of Sydney bars earlier this year, with a view to attacking the summer market in earnest. Watch out for a serious tilt at the alcopop end of the drinkers' market.

Among the lighter-hearted beer brigade, Monteith's Summer Ale from New Zealand offers something different – a lightly spiced golden ale with a dash of native rata honey. The spice element seems to have been reeled in recently, with just the merest hint of ginger in the finish and little in the



way of hop bitterness.

Wheat-based beers offer another alternative for those looking for beers with a twist, and Hoegaarden Wit or Feral White are both spiced Belgian style witbiers with minimal bitterness. Feral White is a fairly brave brand from another West Australian craft brewer and a trophy winner at this year's Australian International Beer Awards.

Barons Lemon Myrtle Witbier brings a decidedly Aussie slant to the style, utilising native lemon myrtle and wild lime, rather than the usual dried orange peel. The cloudy wheat beer is less cloying than other interpretations and the citrus edge is fairly restrained; a good choice to slake a saltwater- and sand-induced thirst after a day at the beach.

Highly aromatic hop varieties are driving

a trend towards more flavoursome beers without over-the-top hop bitterness or high-octane alcohol levels. Such beers include James Squire Golden Ale, Little Creatures Bright Ale and Knapppstein Reserve Lager, and while they don't adhere strictly to a single beer style, let's lump them together as "aromatic beers".

Hop varieties used include amarillo from the US and savin from New Zealand. The resulting beers are characterised by citrus and riper fruit flavour notes, such as passionfruit, melon and pineapple. Both James Squire Golden Ale and Little Creatures Bright Ale weigh in at a relatively moderate 4.5 per cent, which means they are ideal summer ales, delivering plenty of flavour without too much alcohol.





While French lawyers have aggressively sought to protect their country's prized wine appellations – such as champagne and beaujolais – the Czechs have a curiously inverted view of such matters. Pilsener – also known as pils or pilsner – is perhaps the most widely used and often abused adopted beer term. In the Czech Republic it can only be applied to a beer brewed in the city of Pilsen and the designation is strictly enforced by law. But anywhere else in the world

“pilsener” is applied to all manner of pale lagers without, apparently, attracting the interest of any Czech legal eagles.

Staropramen is a fine Czech lager and, being brewed in Prague, would never dare to label itself as a pilsener, while Matilda Bay Bohemian Pilsner unashamedly borrows the name; thankfully it is a faithful interpretation, displaying floral hop notes, a solid malt palate and a generously bitter finish.

Trumer Pils is another to borrow the

appellation and this Austrian brew hails from a town outside Salzburg which, at least, is fairly close to the Bohemian heartland of this famous beer style. This delicately complex lager once trounced a field of 50 German “pilseners” in a European beer competition.

On the local front, Scharer's Lager triumphed in the lager category at the recent Australian Hotel Beer Competition, staged at the landmark pub in The Rocks. Changes in brewers and ownership haven't helped this beer's consistency in recent times but the gong confirms that it is tasting as good as ever.

While Scharer's Lager is an unfiltered and hoppy Bavarian-style lager, Gage Roads Lager from Western Australia is inspired by the northern German variety, which tends to be more highly bittered than its southern counterparts. It's not a style that has many imitators in Australia but this one is well worth tracking down.



Relax outdoors ... this summer brewers are experimenting with alternatives, including Feral White, Pipsqueak Cider and Summer Ale. Photo: Fiona Morris