

CALIFORNIA STATE FAIR HOLDS FIRST COMMERCIAL BEER COMPETITION

by Jay Sheveck

The Los Angeles County Fair, the largest county fair in the United States, held its first-ever Commercial Beer Competition in August and presented awards in 21 categories of beer styles. The competition was designed to showcase the diversity and availability of beer styles brewed in California. It was also the first “commercial” brewing event sponsored by the California Fermentation Society.

“It’s a natural fit to have a commercial beer competition here,” California Fermentation Society (CFS) President Wayne Holder said. “The commercial wine and olive oil competitions are a very big deal to this fair, so they wanted to make the first commercial beer competition a big deal also.”

L.A. Fair organizers called upon the recently formed beer-friendly public-benefit corporation for assistance with overseeing the competition process. Over 120 California-brewed beers, all draught, were entered in the contest. A select panel of 30 beer judges was assigned by Judging Coordinator Mike Cullen. CFS held the competition on the first weekend of August inside the cavernous Hall #4 of the L.A. Fairgrounds. Each beer was observed, smelled, tasted and scored by the judges in the presence of L.A. Fair staff, volunteer stewards and numerous media photographers and reporters.

“We solicited many of the professional brewers from the breweries entering beers in the competition to judge at the competi-

tion,” Holder said, “and we also selected locally available homebrew judges from the BJCP [Beer Judge Certification Program] pool. The turnout was solid in [beer] entries as well as judges.”

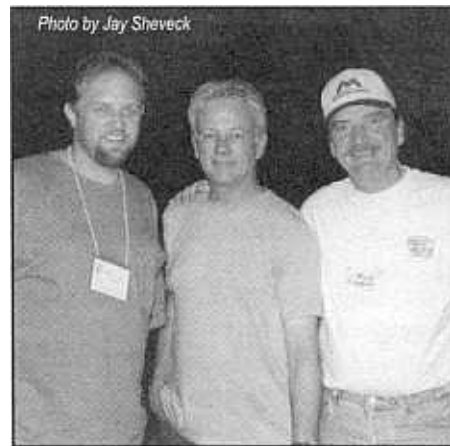
In conjunction with the commercial beer competition, CFS sponsored and operated a beer-tasting booth during the fair that offered samples of every beer entered for judging.

“The booth is primarily an educational tool. It’s designed to educate the public about the diversity and variety of beer styles, and quality issues,” said Vice President Don Van Valkenburg. “After the fair, we [at CFS] are planning to do more educational events related to beer in areas of beer appreciation, homebrewing and commercial brewing.”

Competition winners were officially announced before the fair’s opening day in September. The “Best of Show” ribbon was awarded to Ballast Point Brewing Company of San Diego for its Calico Am-

ber Ale in the American Amber Ale category. A complete list of the 2002 competition winners is posted at www.calferm.com.

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(Left to right) President Wayne Holder, Vice President Don Van Valkenburg and Secretary Rick Adams of the California Fermentation Society helped to organize and oversee the L.A. County Fair’s first annual Commercial Beer Competition.