

Brewers fill 'er up

First-ever beer contest held at Fairplex

By GINA TENORIO

INLAND VALLEY DAILY BULLETIN 210 MAGAZINE STAFF WRITER

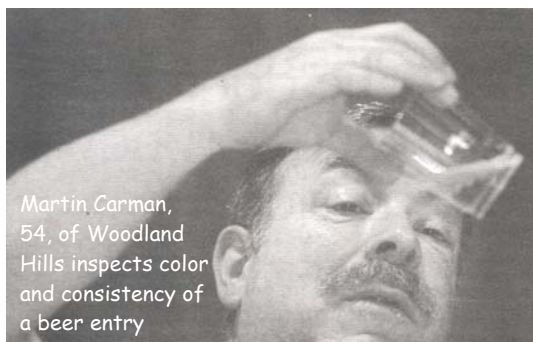
Photos by Therese Tran/Staff photographer

Some at the show were pale. Some stout. And all had the potential to be intoxicating. Beers of all kinds were front and center Aug. 3 at the Pomona Fairplex. Home and professional brewers, many of them members of the **California Fermentation Society**, gathered to judge beers made by smaller professional brewers from around California.

Intoxication was the furthest thing from the mind of the 40-some volunteers who judged this first-ever beer competition. Instead the men and women, with pitchers in hand, set out to determine the best beer in the group.

The winners, selected from the 120 entries, needed to have that special something, said Bill Romero of Ontario, owner of Old Baldy Brewing Co.

While judges sought the winner, beer fans have possibly found an oasis. Patrons of the Los Angeles County Fair, scheduled to open in September, will be able to taste many of the beers that competed.



Martin Carman, 54, of Woodland Hills inspects color and consistency of a beer entry

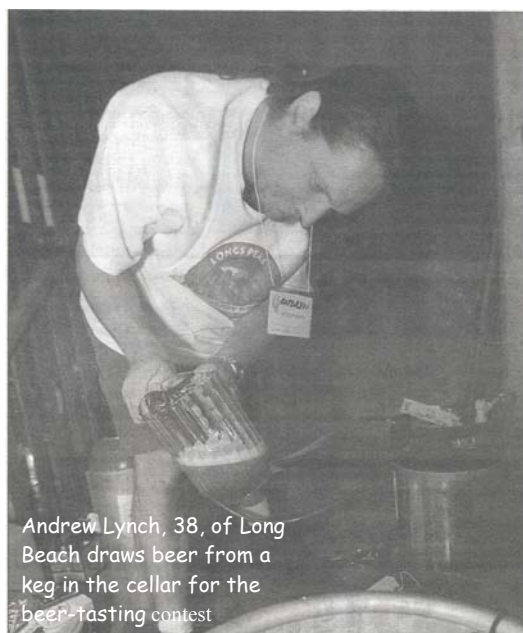
Judging from the number of entries, brewers were thirsting for an event of this kind, said Don Van Valkenberg, vice president of the **California Fermentation Society**. "this kind of event is held for wine tasting," he said. "That gets a good response."

So has this first-time event, he noted. The entire event was run by experts in the field of beer brewing who have products they sell on the market.

It is different from home-brewing competitions held in the past. In this case, the competitors make a living selling their beer, said Mike Cullen, member of fermentation society and the competition's organizer. "When you judge the home brew, you look for things that are wrong with the brew," he said.

"You try to give people tips on how to improve their beer. Not with these. You pick out all that's right."

Judges spent most of the time at tables, sipping from plastic cups. Volunteer stewards delivered quarter or half-filled pitchers of the frosty beverage from a refrigerated cellar, where it was chilled at 38 degrees.



Andrew Lynch, 38, of Long Beach draws beer from a keg in the cellar for the beer-tasting contest

They studied the beers' color and aroma. They did all this to 25 different categories of beers. Judges identified the beers by number. Only the organizers knew how to identify the beers.

"There are more possible flavors in beer than in wine," Van Valkenberg said.

"California is a great (beer) brewing state," said John Palmer, a judge and home brewer from Monrovia. "We're judging these beers on their merit and tasting some of the things these brewers are trying."

The contest and the opportunity the public will have to taste the beer during the fair will hopefully educate the public about beers and show there is something beyond the three big brewers - Coors, Miller and Budweiser - said fellow judge and home brewer Chuck West of San Diego.