

The Champion Beer of Britain (CBOB) and Champion Winter Beer of Britain (CWBOB) competitions

How do the Champion Beer of Britain (CBOB) and Champion Winter Beer of Britain (CWBOB) competitions work?

All cask conditioned beers available for 3 months, during a calendar year, can be entered into the selection process that starts during September and October, when members can vote for their favourite beers in each of CAMRA's style categories.

Voting is usually by region (not all the same as CAMRA's regions, as some are amalgamated), but in some bigger regions members can only vote for beers in their county or group of counties. For example in East Anglia, if you live in Essex you can vote only for Essex beers, and if you live in Suffolk you can only vote for Suffolk beers and so on. These arrangements vary from region to region, and are currently under review.

These nominations go forward to the CAMRA Area CBOB coordinators, responsible for co-ordinating Area competitions. The regional taste panels also input their opinions on beers which deserve to go forward. These nominations are then ranked and the top selections go forward to the Area competitions, where Area category winners are selected and forwarded into the final CBOB and CWBOB competitions. This ensures that there is an even spread of beer styles from all regions of the UK.

Our overwhelming preference is that these beers which go forward should be judged at regional beer festivals. This adds some objectivity and integrity to the process as the majority of the judges will be CAMRA trained, and the tastings are blind. All coordinators are urged to get as many beers judged at festivals as possible - preferably all of them, including the bottled beer category. This takes place over the year following the votes.

The winners go forward to the 3 national competitions – the Great British Beer Festival Winter for the winter beers (CWBOB), the Great British Beer Festival for the rest of the beers and the BBC Good Food Show Winter, in November, for the bottled beers.

This long timescale is frustrating, and can lead to issues with beer availability/continuity, but if we are to judge at festivals then there is no way round it for now. Some suggestions include using taste panels to help judge to cut down the time taken overall, but many parts of the country do not have active taste panels at the moment.

At the Great British Beer Festival, the final CBOB category judging of the Area winners takes place, with 1 winning beer from the Golden Ale, Speciality Beer, Mild and Strong Bitter categories, coupled with 2 each from the Bitter and Best Bitter categories proceeding into the final round in order to judge the Supreme Champion, which is crowned the best beer in Britain.

The reason for 2 beers each from the Bitter and Best Bitter categories is to accommodate for the proportionate share of the commercial beer market these beer styles command.

Four beers that are fast tracked to the final round are the winners of each category of the Champion Winter Beer of Britain competition, held at the Great British Beer Festival Winter in January/February each year. As these beers were judged to be the Champion Beers of their style earlier in the year, they are entered automatically into the final round of CBOB.

The CWBOB competition is similar in its structure to CBOB, as the final round of judging is made up of beers having reached this stage via the process of CAMRA local branch and tasting panel nominations, followed by Area competition success. The categories in this competition are Old Ale/Strong Mild, Porter, Stout and Barley Wine/Strong Old Ale. Please note there is a separate competition for the Champion Bottled Beer of Britain (Real Ale in Bottle).

Like CBOB and CWBOB, the structure of the competition relies upon CAMRA local branch and tasting panel nominations, followed by the Area competitions, with the final held at the BBC Good Food Show in November.



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What can breweries do to get their beer submitted for consideration?

Aside from ensuring their beers are of a consistently excellent standard throughout the year, brewers can consult their respective CAMRA Brewery Liaison Officer (BLO) to gain clarification on whether their beer fits the criteria defined by the categories in CAMRA's Beer Styles Guidelines. When a list of eligible beers has been established, it is the role of the BLO to supply this list for reference to the respective CAMRA Area Competition Organiser.

If brewers have any questions whatsoever regarding their beer's eligibility, they are asked to consult their BLO for clarification; if they are unable to help then brewers should contact their Area Competition Organiser, details of whom are available from CAMRA HQ.

To help breweries ensure they have the maximum opportunity to progress in the competition there are several other things they need to know. Firstly beers are categorised according to their ABV, as it now is considered this is more reflective of style, and easier for most beer drinkers to understand.

To be eligible for CBOB, a cask conditioned Bitter, Best Bitter, Strong Bitter or Golden Ale must be available for 7 or more months of the year, and a cask conditioned Mild or Speciality Beer must be available for 3 or more months of the year, or else the cask conditioned beer must be one of the beer styles associated with the Winter season (Old Ales, Strong Milds, Barley Wine, Strong Old Ale, Porter or Stout).

The BIS has five categories for availability: 12 months of the year; 7-11 months; 3-6 months; 1-2 months; and On Demand.

Also excluded are beers with misleadingly promoted geographical origin or brands with non- cask versions misleadingly promoted using CAMRA awards.

Nick Boley, National Director Responsible for CBOB

