



THE MAZER CUP INTERNATIONAL MEADERY COMPETITION

Commercial Competition - Styles

The following descriptions apply to all the mead styles, except where explicitly superseded in the sub-category guidelines. This introduction identifies common characteristics and descriptions for all types of mead, and should be used as a reference whenever entering or judging mead.

Commercial Mead Characteristics

Sweetness

Mead may be dry, semi-sweet, or sweet. Sweetness simply refers to the amount of residual sugar in the mead. Sweetness is often confused with fruitiness in dry mead. Body is related to sweetness, but dry meads can still have some body. Dry meads do not have to be bone dry. Dryness in mead is distinct from tannic qualities, which are generally only detectable if adjuncts are used. All meads should exhibit good balance, and should not have a raw, unfermented honey character. Sweetness is independent of strength.

Carbonation

Mead may be still or sparkling. Still meads do not have to be totally flat; they can have some very light bubbles. Sparkling meads may have a character ranging from mouth-filling to an impression akin to Champagne or soda pop. Bubbles should be short lived.

Strength

Mead may be categorized as hydromel/session, standard, or sack strength. Strength refers to the alcohol content of the mead (and also, therefore, the amount of honey and fermentables used to make the mead). Stronger meads can have a greater honey character and body (as well as alcohol) than weaker meads, although this is not a strict rule. All meads should be well balanced.

Special Ingredients and Identifiers

Some types of honey have a strong varietal character (aroma, flavor, color, acidity). If a honey is unusual, additional information can be provided to judges as to the character to be expected. Different sub-styles may include fruit, spice, malt, etc. Judges may need to understand the ingredients that provide a unique character in order to properly evaluate the mead. Regardless of honey variety, or special ingredients, all meads should be well balanced.

Appearance

Clarity may be good to brilliant. Crystal clear, reflective examples with a bright, distinct meniscus are highly desirable. Observable particulates (even in a clear example) are undesirable. Carbonated examples have a short-lasting head similar to Champagne or soda pop. The components of bubbles or head will vary greatly depending on the carbonation level, ingredients and type of mead. In general, smaller bubbles are more desirable and indicative of higher quality than larger bubbles. The color may vary widely depending on honey variety and any optional ingredients (e.g., fruit, malts). Some honey varieties are almost clear, while others can be dark brown. Most are in the straw to gold range. If no honey variety is declared, almost any color is acceptable. Hue, saturation and purity of color should be considered. Stronger versions (standard and sack) may show signs of body (e.g., legs, meniscus) but higher carbonation levels can interfere with this perception.

Aroma

Stronger or sweeter meads may have a stronger honey aroma than drier or weaker versions. Different varieties of honey have different intensities and characters; some (e.g., orange blossom, buckwheat) are more recognizable than others (e.g., avocado, palmetto). The aromatics may seem vinous (similar to wine), and may include fruity, floral, or spicy notes. The bouquet (rich, complex smells arising from the combination of ingredients, fermentation and aging) should show a pleasant fermentation character, with clean and fresh aromatics being preferred over dirty, yeasty, or sulfury notes. A multi-faceted bouquet, also known as complexity or depth, is a positive attribute. Phenolic or diacetyl aromatics should not be present. Harsh or chemical aromatics should not be present. Light oxidation may be present, depending on age, and may result in sherry-like notes, which are acceptable in low to moderate levels (if in balance, these can add to complexity). An excessive unbalanced sherry character is a fault. Oxidation resulting in a papery character is always undesirable. Alcohol aromatics may be present, but hot, solventy or irritating overtones are a defect. The harmony and balance of the aroma and bouquet should be pleasant and enticing.

Flavor

Stronger, sweeter meads will have a stronger honey flavor than drier, weaker versions. Different varieties of honey have different intensities and characters. The residual sweetness level will vary with the sweetness of the mead; dry meads will have no residual sugar, sweet meads will have noticeable to prominent sweetness, semi-sweet meads will have a balanced sweetness. In no case should the residual sweetness be syrupy, cloying or seem like unfermented honey. Any additives, such as acid or tannin, should enhance the honey flavor and lend balance to the overall character of the mead but not be excessively tart or astringent. Artificial, chemical, harsh, phenolic or bitter flavors are defects. Higher carbonation (if present) enhances the acidity and gives a "bite" to the finish. The aftertaste should be evaluated; longer finishes are generally most desirable. A multi-faceted flavor, also known as

complexity or depth, is a positive attribute. Yeast or fermentation characteristics may be none to noticeable, with estery, fresh and clean flavors being most desirable. Alcohol flavors (if present) should be smooth and well-aged, not harsh or solventy. Light oxidation may be present, depending on age, but an excessive sherry-like or papery character should be avoided. Aging and conditioning generally smooth out flavors and create a more elegant, blended, rounded product. Flavors tend to become more subtle over time, and can deteriorate with extended aging.

Mouthfeel

Well-made examples will often have an elegant wine-like character. The body can vary widely, although most are in the medium-light to medium-full range. Body generally increases with stronger and/or sweeter meads, and can sometimes be quite full and heavy. Similarly, body generally decreases with lower gravity and/or drier meads, and can sometimes be quite light. Sensations of body should not be accompanied by an overwhelmingly cloying sweetness (even in sweet meads). A very thin or watery body is likewise undesirable. Some natural acidity is often present (particularly in fruit-based meads). Low levels of astringency are sometimes present (either from specific fruit or spices, or from tea, chemical additives or oak-aging). Acidity and tannin should be used to help balance the overall honey, sweetness and alcohol presentation. Carbonation can vary widely (see definitions above). High carbonation will enhance the acidity and give a "bite" to the finish. A warming alcohol presence is often present, and this character usually increases with strength (although extended aging can smooth this sensation).

Overall Impression

A wide range of results are possible, but well-made examples will have an enjoyable balance of honey flavors, sweetness, acidity, tannins, alcohol. Strength, sweetness and age greatly affect the overall presentation. Any special ingredients should be well-blended with the other ingredients, and lead to a harmonious end product.

Ingredients

Mead is made primarily from honey, water and yeast. Some minor adjustments in acidity and tannin can be made with citrus fruits, tea, chemicals, or the use of oak aging; however, these additives should not be discordant in flavor or aroma. If citrus, tea, or oak additives result in flavor components above a low, background, balance-adjusting level, the resulting mead should be entered appropriately (e.g., as a metheglin or open category mead, not a traditional).

Vital Statistics

ABV: session/hydromel: 3.5 - 7.5% standard: 7.5 - 14% sack: 14 - 18%

Residual Sugar: dry: 0%-2% semi-sweet: 2.1%-5% sweet: 5.1%+

COMMERCIAL ENTRIES

Entry Guidelines

- Entrants should use the Style Categories listed below.
- Additional categories maybe added if sufficient numbers of meads in a particular style cause the organizers to deem it necessary.

Category-Specific Requirements

- Entrants must specify honey varieties used in the 12A Varietal Mead Category.
- Some categories require additional information particularly in categories other than traditional mead. For example, declaring specific fruit for melomels, spices for metheglin, grape varietal for pyment, or special characteristics.
- Supplemental materials may be provided to judges if an obscure ingredient or method is used.
- If no attributes are specified, judges will evaluate the mead against the category entered.

Style Categories

1. Bracket or Braggot:

Honeywine made with malt, must be fermented from at least 20% honey.

2. Cyser:

Honeywine made with apple cider, apple juice or apples.

3. Dessert Mead:

Honeywine with an ABV of 14% alcohol or over. This category may also include any ingredients from other categories.

3A - Dessert Mead - Semi-Sweet

3B - Dessert Mead - Sweet

4. Other Fruit/Vegetable Melomel:

This is an open category for all other melomels. Note: meads made with grapes or grape juices should be entered in Category 6, Pyment.

4A - Other Fruit/Vegetable Melomel - Dry

4B - Other Fruit/Vegetable Melomel - Semi Sweet

4C - Other Fruit/Vegetable Melomel - Sweet

5. Metheglin:

Honeywine made with any herbs or spices. Note: T'ej should be entered in this category.

6. Pyment:

Honeywine made with grapes/grape juice/grape concentrate.

7. Session Mead :

Honeywine produced with an ABV of 10% alcohol or below. This category may include any ingredients from other categories.

8. Specialty (Open Category) :

This open category is for Honeywine that does not fit into any other category.

8A - Specialty (Open Category) - Dry

8B - Specialty (Open Category) - Semi-Sweet

8C - Specialty (Open Category) - Sweet

9. Traditional:

Honeywine from a mixed variety of honeys, no fruits, herbs or spices added.

9A - Traditional - Dry

9B - Traditional - Semi-Sweet

9C - Traditional - Sweet

10. Varietal:

Honeywine made from single-bloom or variety of honey; no fruits, herbs, spices or other major flavor ingredients

10A - Varietal - Dry

10B - Varietal - Semi-Sweet

10C - Varietal - Sweet