

ALL SET FOR BRITAIN'S BIGGEST CELEBRATION OF CIDER AT ROYAL BATH AND WEST

Entries for the British Cider Championships, to be held in the Orchards and Cider Pavilion at the Royal Bath and West Show (June 1-4) have once again topped 500, reinforcing their reputation as the biggest as well as the most prestigious cider competition in Europe.

Every kind of cider, from every scale of cider-maker, will be represented in the Championships, ranging from ultra-traditional farmhouse ciders, through the new wave of artisan ciders, to the products of mainstream commercial cider-makers. There is also another strong entry for the international classes, which will feature ciders and perries from as far away as the USA and Northern Spain. And, in order to ensure that the Championships reflect current trends in the industry, a class for the increasingly popular 'fruit ciders' has been introduced this year for the first time.

Orchards and Cider Chief Steward, Bob Chaplin, said that whilst large-scale cider-making in Somerset had suffered a blow, through the closure of the Shepton Mallet Cider Mill, the traditional and artisan sectors were still going from strength to strength.

"The range of ciders now being produced in the West Country is wider than ever, and the quality is higher than ever", he said. "Entries in the British Cider Championships reflect that, as does the ever-growing range of trade stands in our Orchards and Cider Exhibition, which now offers more ciders, more information, more cider-making and orcharding equipment and more cider-related entertainment than you will find at any other show. It is a real celebration of apples and cider, and there is plenty to celebrate."

Judging takes place over the first two days of the Show, with the Fruiterers Trophy for the Champion British Cider and all the other major trophies being presented on Thursday afternoon, June 2nd. This year's celebrity guest judge is Gill Meller, Head Chef for Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's River Cottage team, and an enthusiastic champion for, and consumer of, West Country cider.

An increasingly popular feature of the Orchards and Cider Exhibition is the "People's Choice" competition, in which members of the public get their chance to apply their taste-buds to the cream of British ciders. A short-list of six in each of four categories of cider - dry, medium, sweet and unconventional - has been compiled based on the results from this year's South-West of England Cider Association cider competition, from which show-goers can select their favourite.

And if the amateur cider judges need any help in deciding what to look for, they can get it in the tutored cider tastings held regularly during all four days of the show, led by some of the biggest names in the cider business.

However, there is much more to Orchards and Cider than just cider judging. For the ever-growing band of amateur cider-makers, the exhibition now features a more comprehensive range of cider-making equipment than can be found at any other show, and there is advice available from experts on orcharding, choice of apples and every conceivable aspect of cider-making. And for the professionals, the exhibition also includes, in the orchard alongside the marquee, a display of the very latest apple harvesting equipment, laid on by SFM Fruit Harvesting.

But perhaps the most popular feature of Orchards and Cider is the West Country Cider Bar, where visitors can choose from a range of over 40 of the finest ciders produced in the region, and then

enjoy a glass or two, and maybe a bite to eat from a selection of local food outlets, sitting in the orchard, listening to the music of the Woodlanders.

It all makes for the perfect Bath and West experience!