

British Cider Championships 2016

Blackmore Vale is Champion British Cider, with Kilmegan from Northern Ireland the runner-up

A classic medium dry Somerset cider made by Alan Berry of Blackmore Vale Cider at Templecombe has been adjudged Supreme Champion in the British Cider Championships at the Royal Bath and West Show.

But the Reserve Champion, Kilmegan bottled dry cider, comes from a very different corner of the United Kingdom, made as it is at Dundrum, in County Down, Northern Ireland.

The ciders were chosen by the judges from an initial entry of almost 600, in what is the biggest cider competition in Europe.

Alan Berry's championship-winning cider was made last autumn, from a blend of traditional Somerset varieties of apple from Alison Tilley's orchards at Hadspen, near Castle Cary.

"Apart from growing the apples, I do everything else myself - blending the apples, milling, pressing, fermenting, bottling, even labelling", said a delighted Alan, who is 67, after collecting the Fruiterers' Trophy from the Master of the Worshipful Company of Fruiterers, Stephen Bellamy-James.

"I have always believed that the keys to making good cider are good quality apples, then blending them, some sweet, some sharp, so as to get the right balance, spotlessly clean equipment and, above all, a lot of knowledge.

"I said when I was selecting the cider for the competition that I'd got a good one for this year. I'd tasted the different barrels and picked one that was absolutely right.

"I can hardly believe that I've won, given the strength of the competition. It's certainly the greatest moment of my cider-making life."

Alan is a keen supporter of Orchards and Cider at the Royal Bath and West and has been entering the cider competition since he started his business about 12 years ago. His Blackmore Vale ciders are sold in shops and small supermarkets in his local, South Somerset area.

The runner-up for the Supreme Championship is a dry cider produced by Andrew Boyd of Kilmegan Cider at Dundrum, near Newcastle County Down. One of only around eight commercial cider-makers in Northern Ireland, Andrew set up his business three years ago. He described the accolades of a Gold Award in the bottled dry cider class, followed by up by Reserve Supreme Champion as "beyond my wildest dreams".

"I'm a very traditional cider-maker using very traditional processes. I make the sort of cider that I like to drink. We buy our apples from County Down, Armagh and Tipperary, and they're a mixture of well-known cider varieties like Dabinett and Michelin, and more modern varieties.

"The recognition that will come with this award is absolutely massive. To get this sort of recognition from the premier cider competition in Britain is a huge boost, not just for my business but for cider-making in Northern Ireland."

Senior judge for the final eliminator, Nick Bradstock, had high praise for both ciders.

"The Blackmore Vale medium is a beautifully balanced, fresh but very traditional cider. Despite coming from so far away, the Kilmegan dry also has a classic bittersweet character, and it was very hard to choose between them. Both are superb examples of their type and thoroughly deserved to come out on top in a competition where the overall standard was as high as ever."

The winner of the Trophy for Craftsmanship in the Cider Industry, presented by the Master of the Worshipful Company of Coopers, Vivian Bairstow, was Gilly Pollock who set up and runs the ONE Network of Orchard Management, which has done so much to improve the quality of apple and pear orchards across the West Midlands and the West Country. With well over 100 members of its network, ONE has become the central hub for orcharding excellence.

Orchard management is also an important part of the Orchards and Cider remit. This year, Royal Bath and West Silver medals went to James Pullen, of Tintinhull, in the bush orchards section, and Angus Macdonald of Butleigh in the standard orchards.

Chairman of the judges, John Thatcher, said that the size and the quality of the entry for this year's orchard competition was the highest for several years.

"Judging the orchards is one of my favourite jobs of the year", he said. "It is very encouraging to see not only the excellence of the very best, but also how previously neglected orchards are being restored".

The other major prize winners in the championships were as follows:

Vigo Trophy for Best Apple Juice in show: David Roberts from Herefordshire (who wins for the second year in a row), who also took the Reserve.

Arthur Davies Cup for Single Variety Bottled Cider and Bottle presentation: Woodredding Cider, Herefordshire (also a second successive win), with Sheppy's Cider of Bradford-on-Tone as Reserve.

SFM Trophy for Best International Cider: Valle Ballina y Fernandez, from Asturias in Northern Spain, with Uncle John's Cider Mill Russet, from St John Missouri USA as Reserve.

Lawrence Reilly Cup for the Champion British Perry: Butford Organics, Ledbury, Herefordshire, with Once Upon a Tree from Ledbury in Herefordshire as Reserve.

Westons Cider Cup for the Champion British Organic Cider: Dorset Nectar, Netherbury, who also won the Reserve.

The Worshipful Company of Pewterers' Cup for the British Champion Farmhouse Cider: Cranborne Chase Cider, with Venton's Devon Cider as Reserve.

A full list of prize-winners in all the British Cider Championships classes can be found on the Bath and West website (add link)

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