

Greene King starts to send fake beer engines to the USA; meets online grassroots resistance

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Greene King have recently started to send over a wave of fake beer engines for use with one of their processed keg beers, Old Speckled Hen, in American bars. These devices appear similar to a new design of beer engine, with an enlarged swan neck spout, which are appearing in the UK to dispense cask ale. However, the export version is designed to dispense filtered keg beer so can be classed as misleading dispense.

In America, real cask-conditioned beer is currently riding on the crest of the wave of the microbrew revolution. The beer engine, or handpump, is the universal symbol of cask-conditioned ale and lager – and is a familiar sight at many American craft-beer-centric places. In New York City, as an example, there are over 50 permanent cask outlets, including some with up to four firkins tapped at once.

At best, any bar choosing Greene King's offer of keg beer coupled to misleading dispense equipment is risking their customers (and, on occasions, bar staff) presuming such a beer is cask-conditioned from familiarity with real beer engines. At worst, a bar can falsely claim the beer is actual cask to deliberately mislead their customers – who in general pay more for cask beer than the equivalent beer in keg form.

British expat Alex Hall has been helping the spread of cask ale in New York and beyond since 2003, providing British-made cask equipment (through the company that imports it) and also by running cask beer festivals in conjunction with various bars and brewpubs. He is alarmed at Greene King's move which blurs the distinction of what is 'real ale' and what is not Stateside, and is basically the opposite of what the fast-growing American cask ale market needs. As a result, Hall feels the need to rally consumer resistance to Greene King's scheme – as he did to a similar scheme embraced by Fuller's earlier this decade.

Using the 'Groups' feature of the popular Facebook social networking site as a medium, and promoted by his two beer resource websites, Hall has mounted a major grassroots campaign to unite craft beer drinkers, irrespective of their location, with a single collective message to Greene King: that America's beer drinkers do not appreciate having misleading dispense, which would not be tolerated in the UK, foisted upon them – and are, in general, insulted by the whole scheme. The ultimate aim, with shades of CAMRA's creation in the 1970s, is for the group to grow sizeable enough for Greene King to take notice – and hopefully do a U-turn on the scheme.

Links and contact information

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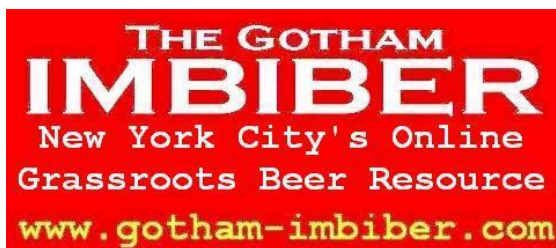
The Facebook page (alternatively, on Facebook, search for "Tell Greene King"):
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=168746171575>

Alex Hall's 'Greene King Insults America' page:
<http://www.gotham-imbiber.com/new-fake-threat.html>

The above are linked from Alex Hall's general American web pages:
<http://www.gotham-imbiber.com/> and <http://www.cask-ale.co.uk/us/>

Also, the message is spreading as a grassroots campaign through pages such as
<http://beerinbaltimore.com/2009/10/29/pulling-a-fast-one-on-cask-ale-market-in-the-u-s/>

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