

Alcoholic Beverages: Whisky and Hard Liquor

July 10, 2017

~ Whisky Enjoys Rising Sales ~

Whisky

Data from the National Tax Administration Agency (from December 2015) put whisky up 18% from the preceding year. Domestic shipments were up 17%, and imports were up even more, by 22%. Jim Beam is the most popular, followed by White Horse Fine Old in second place, Jack Daniels in third, and Ballantynes in fourth. Whisky is mainly consumed outside the home, but home consumption is increasing. Within drinking outside the home, *izakaya* have surpassed bars and restaurants in whisky sales. Whisky drinking has increased as advertising from whisky suppliers has succeeded in instilling new ways to drink and enjoy it, and the way whisky has taken a position as a drink to enjoy casually has been a key factor in its success. For example, Suntory has a campaign to promote “*haikara*”, a combination of its Kaku Highball product and *kara-age* battered foods, and that combination became popular in *izakaya*, and many others bars and restaurants. From this year, Suntory have started publicizing “the highball golden ratio (1:4)” as the way to mix a highball. Other suggestions for ways to drink highballs, such as with Japanese food ingredients like *sudachi* citrus, Japanese pepper, *oba* leaves, and ginger, are getting traction.



Let's make high ball !

1. Lightly squeeze lemon
2. Lots of ice
3. Whiskey 1: Soda 4
4. Stir lightly with muddler

From Suntory advertising

Hard Liquor

Among hard liquor, Beefeater gin is top in the Spirits category. Gilbeys, Wilkinson, Bombay Sapphire, Tanqueray, and Gordons are also growing. Gin has a steady popularity. Among spirits, Cuervo tequila and Smirnov vodka have deep-rooted

popularity. Bacardi is also well-liked as the top rum brand. These hard liquors are being developed into RTD products and gathering consumer support. “Wilkinson Hard Sugar-free Dry”, using Wilkinson gin, is mixed with Wilkinson soda to make a strongly carbonated canned RTD (ready to drink) product.



Photo from the Asahi Beer website

“Sugar-free” products, including soft drinks and yoghurts, have recently been attracting attention in the foods market. These products are supported by customers who are concerned about conventional sugars and carbohydrates and are starting to accept the “non-sweet” flavor itself, which comes from sugar-free composition. According to Asahi Beer, high-alcohol plain cocktails are gaining high popularity in the RTD market among men in their 40s~60s.



Photo from the Japan Food Journal website

Suntory Spirits are offering a new way to drink tequila, in a fresh-squeezed sour drink with syrup and soda. Make it by putting 30ml of Sauza Blue and 10ml of syrup in a special plastic bottle, adding fresh fruit or vegetables, packing with ice, then pouring soda over the ice. Other than the Grapefruit flavor, containing grapefruit, flavors include tomato, cucumber and lemon, and coriander lime. The main target is women in their 20s

and 30s. In a test rollout, descriptions like “looks colorful and cute” and “delicious and easy to drink” helped to update the conventional image of tequila. Prices are in the range JPY500~800 per bottle.

While young people are said to be drifting away from alcohol, increasing numbers of young people are uploading photos of photogenic cocktails with gin, vodka, tequila and the like to their social media. They have to taste good, of course, but there is also a tendency to emphasize appearance and photogenicity. From now on, there will be a strong need for distributors to be able to pitch ideas for using their products, in ways that incorporate photogenic elements, such as pictures to upload to social media.