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news ▾

chefs & restaurants ▾

reviews ▾

recipes ▾

features ▾

all categories ▾

## Narragansett Porter - Beer of the Week

by [Joshua M. Bernstein](#), Posted Feb 28th 2011 @ 5:00PM



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In this day and age retro beer brands are all the rage, with drinkers sucking down Schlitz and PBR like they're going out of style -- again. But nostalgia is not enough for me to overlook one glaring fact: These beers don't taste all that great.

So you can understand my trepidation when, last summer in Connecticut, I stumbled across a six-pack of lager tall boys from [Narragansett](#). I was attracted to the can's classic look and \$6.99 price tag. Instead of a cheap, watery lager, I was rewarded by a rich, crisp flavor. What was Narragansett, and why was it so good?

New England's Narragansett was born in 1890, and within 25 years it became the region's largest lager brewery. Over the decades, Narragansett became the de facto beverage for New Englanders, even serving as the Boston Red Sox's official beer. In the seventies, though, the company was sold. The Rhode Island brewery was later shuttered, and production shifted to Indiana. Quality suffered. By 2005, the brand seemed destined for death. Then along came Mark Hellendrung, the former president of Nantucket Nectars. He and investors bought the brand and, over the last five years, have set about restoring Narragansett to its lofty perch.

"Narragansett was so big and had such a rich history. It has so much heritage," says Hellendrung, who decided to give the brand a new, yet familiar look. "When we did the packaging, it couldn't look like we pulled it out of the attic and dusted it off," he says. Like magpies, the designers plucked elements from the brand's past: the script logo from the fifties, another font from the twenties, and the phrase "made on merit" from 1904.

To fill the classic cans with the classic formula, Hellendrung turned to former Narragansett brewer Bill Anderson to re-create the lager. "The recipe didn't exist anywhere but inside Bill's head," Hellendrung says of the revived brew, which amps up the bitterness a bit. Not a lager fan? Not to worry. Narragansett also offers line of craft-worthy seasonals such as fall's amber Fest and the strong bock for spring. Yet my favorite is winter's luscious porter.

From the can, the brew dispenses a deep black, topped by a lusciously thick tan head and boasting a bouquet of coffee and milk chocolate. The porter drinks suprisingly crisp and creamy, with just a touch of roast and hop bitterness to balance out the cocoa character. In fact, the beer goes down so easy, you might overlook that 7 percent ABV -- at least I did.

Welcome back, Narragansett. Here's to another century of stellar beer.

*Joshua M. Bernstein has written about brews, bars and booze for [New York Magazine](#), [Time Out New York](#), [Imbibe Magazine](#) and [The New York Times](#). His beer book, *Brewed Awakening*, will be published by Sterling this fall. Follow him on Twitter [@JoshMBernstein](#).*

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