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THE GAY AGENDA

A Bubbly Summer

We've peeled back the caps and tabs on six brands of popular hard sodas to uncover the cream of the pop-tops

By Mikey Rox

Hard sodas—that is, fizzy beverages with an alcohol content, for the yet unfamiliar—are having something of a moment. In the past 18 months, brands like Not Your Father's, Henry's Hard Soda and Best Damn have infiltrated bars and home fridges, stealing market share from traditional beers and those still-trendy hard ciders that rose to prominence just a few years back. And it's easy to see why: they're fun, tasty and even a bit nostalgic.

"While hard sodas may have initially hit the scene in spring last year, they have recently gained major traction," says **Trisha Antonsen**, chief cocktail officer at *Drizly.com*, a packaged-alcohol delivery service that serves Los Angeles. "At about 5% ABV, flavors such as root beer, ginger ale and orange soda promise more than just a sugary buzz."

While that sounds good on paper, we had to put it to the test. So we guzzled down eight different hard soda brands to present you with the best of the best. Only six made the cut, and these are our sticky-sweet standout faves.





Best Damn Root Beer

Among the relative abundance of adult root beers available—the most common flavor in hard sodas—Best Damn reigns supreme. Where others were too sweet, too syrupy or missed the mark on genuine root beer flavor because of overpowering alcohol, this aged-on-vanilla-beans ale satisfies fresh from the can or paired with ice cream in a grown-up float. 5.5% ABV

Not Your Father's Vanilla Cream Ale

Smooth, creamy and made with Madagascar vanilla, Not Your Father's reimagines cream soda inventor **Alexander C. Howell's** effervescent concoction as a 21-and-older nod to a bygone era that can now only be experienced through your taste buds. 4.1% ABV

Farmer Willie's Alcoholic Ginger Beer

Cold-pressed ginger and lemon converge in harmony in this spicy rendition of a home remedy stomach-settler. Farmer Willie's Alcoholic Ginger Beer tickles the tongue while the complex composition of its formula—at least it tastes that way—suggests a sophistication wise beyond the years of its makers, a Cape Cod goat farmer and two enterprising college kids. 4.5% ABV

Hard Frescos Juicy Jamaica

One of the most adventurous flavors in the test group, Hard Frescos Juicy Jamaica is brewed with real hibiscus and is a welcome departure from the more conventional options. This "malt beverage" is interesting, light and a bona fide pick-me-up when served ice cold on a sun-scorched lanai. 5% ABV

Henry's Hard Orange Soda

Henry's nails the orange part of the equation—if you're a fan of Sunkist, Fanta or Crush sodas, you'll like this—but the citrus notes seem secondary as the alcohol is equally present. It's still a great throwback pop for a new generation, mind you, but it's a little too reminiscent of a Mike's Hard Lemonade. They could be cousins, in fact. 4.2% ABV

Crabbie's Fruits Cloudy Alcoholic Lemonade

Surprisingly lemony without an alcohol aftertaste, Crabbie's—which glides across the tongue much easier than its name—is ripe for added punch. Kick it up a notch in a glass of ice with a shot of your favorite liquor—perhaps with a berry twist alongside Absolut Raspberry—to realize this crowd-pleaser's full party potential. 4.8% ABV ■



A Slowed-Down Sushi Spot

ONE OF THE LATEST restaurants to call Santa Monica Boulevard home—in the heart of Boystown—is izakaya by Slowfish, a new Asian-fusion spot hoping to take advantage of the area's happy hour devotees and bar-hopping bros. Just off the beaten path of the strip, and featuring its own parking lot (a welcomed rarity), this izakaya—a Japanese take on the gastropub, offering a plethora of small or shared plates—has become a perfect spot for groups of four or more to plop down at a banquette or on the adorably lit patio. Devour dishes as wide-ranging as sushi rolls, tempura-treated veggies, jeon Japanese pancakes, galbi skewers and rice and udon dishes—the work of executive chef **Hyunchang Han**, trained in Tokyo and New York—all in a space that is as convivial as the neighborhood demands, a new must-try for your dining-out roster. 8267 Santa Monica Blvd., izakayaslowfish.com —**Stephan Horbelt**

BEFORE YOU WEAR THAT TANK TOP...

A few questions to ask yourself



1. Where will you be wearing this tank top?

2. Is food served there?

3. How close is the nearest body of water?

4. If food is served there, is it more or less casual than a Señor Frogs?

5. How much skin are you showing exactly?

6. (If your nipples are showing, it's not a shirt.)

7. When was the last time you checked your back hair situation?

8. What about your shoulders?

9. And what about backne?

10. (That's back acne.)

11. Last, but certainly not least, are you sure you're ready to own that tribal tattoo you drunkenly got in the '90s?

12. You sure?

13. Then, as they say, "sun's out, guns out."
—S.H.