Should you read the Instructions?

“First, throw away the Instructions”.

This is a common refrain in brewing literature when working with packaged hopped malt concentrate, typically referred to as Beer Kits. Because the instructions in Coopers Brewery Beer Kits part from the orthodoxy of amateur beermaking, it is not surprising that even many proprietors who swear by the quality of Coopers Brewery products will recommend methodology that is different from what is recommended by the Coopers Brewery. I find that this advice usually comes from “experts” who haven’t actually made beer from a beer kit in a very long time, if ever. The “Throw away the Instructions” orthodoxy stems from two things. The first is the ingrained, mistaken belief that “malt concentrate is malt concentrate is malt concentrate” and there is but one way to work with malt concentrate. The second is an honest difference of opinion about what particular styles of beer should look and taste like.

Let’s examine the specifics of why there is a belief that you should throw away the instructions that come with your Coopers Brewery Beer Kit.

1. “Contrary to the instructions, you must boil malt concentrates”. Not all malt concentrates are made equal. Are there some malt concentrates available in the amateur beermaking market which should be boiled? Absolutely. I wouldn’t NOT boil just about anything that came out of a 55 gallon industrial drum, or came from a plastic jar that came from ???. You not only don’t have to boil malt concentrates that come from the Coopers Brewery, I highly recommend against it. The Coopers Brewery is just that, a brewery. When they produce home beermaking products they are using the exact same procedures as they use in producing their well-regarded ales and stouts. This means in part that Coopers Brewery malt concentrates have already been boiled. And centrifuged. And filtered. And sterile packaged. Boiling Coopers Brewery malt concentrates can only detract from the quality of the product, not add to it.

2. “Contrary to the instructions, don’t add sugar…only add more malt concentrate”. Well, that depends. When you make a Coopers Brewery Lager Beer Kit, are you trying to replicate a West Coast style pale ale (ala Red Hook), or a North American style light lager (ala Budweiser)? How light in body and character do you want your beer to be? What color do you want your beer to be? Want it to look like the beer on the label? Follow the instructions.

3. “Contrary to the instructions, you must do a two-stage fermentation, and then transfer the beer a third time when it is time to bottle”. Sure. If you are a glutton for punishment. Every time you transfer beer to another vessel there is the additional expense of the vessel, there is cleaning, sanitizing, time spent and increased risk of contamination. As long as your fermentation went without a hitch (follow the instructions and it will!), there is no reason why you have to transfer your beer anywhere but from the primary fermenter into the bottles. Some reasons why you may not want to follow the instructions: if you can’t bottle relatively soon after fermentation is finished it is best to transfer your beer off the sediment; if you aren’t using Coopers Brewery Carbonation Drops you will have to “batch prime” to get carbonation; or, you are just naturally masochistic.

4. “Contrary to the instructions, throw away the yeast, and buy a ‘fresh’ package”. We at the Coopers Brewery pride ourselves on ensuring that every time you brew beer with a Coopers Brewery Beer Kit it will ferment the way it is supposed to and it will taste the way it is supposed to. For this reason we date-stamp each of our yeast sachets with a “Best Before” date. And that date roughly corresponds with the “Best Before” date on the bottom of the can. Is the
date on the can still within the “Best Before”? Then so is the yeast, and it will work just fine. Unfortunately not everyone date stamps their yeast, so yes, if you buy a brand of beer kit that doesn’t date stamp their can or their yeast, you are taking a chance. We sell tens of thousands of sachets of yeast separately every year. But not because of people throwing away the yeast that comes with Coopers Brewery beer kits.

5. And finally, “Contrary to the instructions, you can’t just sprinkle the yeast on top of the unfermented beer. You must ‘proof’ it first”. This is suggested for two reasons. One, is to ensure that your yeast is still alive. Because of our quality control and date-stamping, this is not an issue with Coopers Brewery Beer Kits. Second is because of the belief that the yeast will acclimatize to the environment and work better if “proofed”. While this is true of some yeasts used, and is certainly true of the bread yeast that your great-granddad used to make beer, the Coopers Brewery uses a special proprietary strain of beer yeast that not only ferments out consistently and makes flavorful beers, it also works great without being proofed. So, Sprinkle On!