

Food » Food To Go

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With First Squeeze, Raleigh Brewing Company Delivers a Perfect Springtime Beer

By Tina Haver Currin



Photo by Alex Boerner

Ready to travel: Raleigh Brewing's First Squeeze

Tucked on a side road between an Applebee's and a Waffle House is a beer-lover's multiplex at Raleigh Brewing Company. The twenty-barrel brewhouse and taproom are attached to a brewing supply store. Though that interior entices through the smell of sweet malt, an outdoor corral of picnic tables offers the best place to sit, sun, and sip on the brewery's newest seasonal—a zippy blood orange wheat beer.

Originally known as the Big Squeeze, the draft took its name from a period of statewide economic hardship. Governor O. Max Gardner encouraged farmers to grow edible products, like corn and tomatoes, rather than the cash crops of cotton and tobacco. But when the bigger brewery Harpoon issued a shandy called the Big Squeeze, Raleigh Brewing reconsidered a name it had yet to trademark. The beer now goes by First Squeeze, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the original moniker.

Though the Squeeze is a wheat beer, it's distinct from a hefeweizen or a Belgian wit. The difference comes from the style of yeast that American wheat beers use. Hefeweizens use a German strain that tastes of bananas, while the Belgian variety packs a punch of clove. Instead, the American ale strain offers a clean, neutral flavor. Since the piquancy comes from added ingredients, rather than a pervasive yeast character, you'll often see American wheat beers made with delicate flavors, like fruit.

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"That's what makes it really drinkable,"

explains Raleigh Brewing's production manager and head brewer, Alex Smith. "What I love about the Squeeze is that the wheat gives it this great, creamy mouthfeel. There's no vanilla, but I get a light, refreshing Creamsicle effect from the wheat, then a pop of citrus."

When the Squeeze is poured, it arrives golden and hazy, a slightly frothy head on top—so quintessential, it looks like the beer emoji. It smells of straw and honey and tastes like a dollop of orange marmalade served atop toast.

A simple recipe of wheat, malted barley, and caramel malts (for that enticing tawny color) gives the beer its backbone. But it's the blood orange peels, added in the boil and again after fermentation, that provide the special zing. Lightly carbonated and mighty refreshing, this estival ale works just as well poolside as it does at the taproom's picnic tables.



Photo by Alex Boerner
Raleigh Brewing's First Squeeze tastes even better in a pint glass

This year, it even comes in cans.

This article appeared in print with the headline "Color in Your Cheeks"

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