

# THE MOST AMERICAN CHEAP BEER

JOHN COPPONEX

JULY 2, 2015

America has become a meme. Ask the internet, and it'll tell you the definition of America is a picture of Teddy Roosevelt riding a T-Rex punching Joseph Goebbels in the face or some shit—all with the requisite irony of the generation that made normcore a thing and ruined bacon for everyone.

However, the American experience can't be reduced to a jingoist fever dream. It's a bittersweet tapestry of the things we get right and the things we've yet to get right. Two weeks ago, it broke our hearts in Charleston. Last week, it put them back together in the Supreme Court.

The same can be said for our beer. Some is swill. Some is sublime. It's the aggregate of all these experiences that defines American beer. The most American beer isn't a paragon of perfect brewing. It's real.

So for better or worse, we present the most American cheap beer. But first:

## A WORD ON OWNERSHIP

Back in 2004, Miller Brewing stepped in it when they premiered a series of commercials starring Bob Odenkirk as the “President Beers”, taking a jab at Budweiser’s “King of Beers”, which long ago had been acquired by Belgian-Brazilian brewer InBev.

Anheuser-Busch fired back with an ad declaring Miller ineligible to run for office in the U.S. because it was owned by South African brewer SAB Miller. Miller then accused Anheuser of misleading advertising because SAB Miller is based in London, not South Africa.

The point of all this is to illustrate the inscrutable web of international corporate ownership festooning every beer, every drink, basically every product you've ever used. Not one of the major domestic beers have purely American masters, with the exception of Sam Adams and Yuengling, and I don't know who drinks those.

The answer to this would seem to be crowning a local brew the most American cheap beer. The problem with that is the sheer number in the country today.

I don't know what the most American craft beer is, but I know it sure as shit isn't that Tart Plum Saison dumpster water I had last Friday. I'm all for local beer, but the day your favorite microbrew gets too big is the day it gets swallowed up by some Cino-Chilean conglomerate that also holds a majority share in an industrial lubricant manufacturer.

For these reasons, I'll focus on beers you can find in any gas station in any town across these great United States of America.

## 5. BUD LIGHT

In any list of the four most American beers, Bud Light will always be distant fifth. I could launch into a vicious takedown of the taste with ebullient flourishes featuring words like “ogre” and “sweat” and “grundle”, but I'll let Wyatt Cenac take this one:

## Bud Light tastes like butter churned by Boko Haram.

There's a litany of things that make Anheuser-Busch un-American besides its outside ownership. It's shady. It's anti-entrepreneurship. It's responsible for this Lime-A-Rita nonsense.

But the fact is: Bud Light is the Wal-Mart of beers, and that at least lands them a place on the list.

## 3. COORS LIGHT

There was a while there when I refused to drink anything that wasn't brewed with “high country barley” and wasn't as “cold as the Rockies”. I was insufferable.

However, this beer really is an earnest and enjoyable romp through the Southwest, albeit with a footprint that's intercoastal. It's the de facto beer of baseball and, for some reason, music fests. There are few all-American events where you won't see Coors.

And Coors has more in common with Ram trucks than Sam Elliott's voice serving up a campfire kettle of chili to your ears in the commercials. It's also a workhorse. This beer puts in a nine-hour day, gets up at four in the morning and does it all over again. It's got best-in-class towing, 420 lb-ft of torque and a 5-year, 100,000-mile powertrain warranty. It can climb a mountain and ford a river. I know, because it's the beer I was drinking when I got kicked out of the Chattahoochee.

And Coors has more in common with Ram trucks than Sam Elliott's voice serving up a campfire kettle of chili to your ears in the commercials. It's also a workhorse. This beer puts in a nine-hour day, gets up at four in the morning and does it all over again. It's got best-in-class towing, 420 lb-ft of torque and a 5-year, 100,000-mile powertrain warranty. It can climb a mountain and ford a river. I know, because it's the beer I was drinking when I got kicked out of the Chattahoochee.

## 2. MILLER LITE

I freely admit to being a slave to marketing. Commercial for a new rollercoaster at Six Flags? I'm there. Email for special pricing on Braves tickets? Sign me up. Coupon for \$3.99 meals at Captain D's? I mean...I should at least check it out.

So in December 2013 when Miller Lite reintroduced its 1974 design on cans, I had to get a look at those warlocks. Flash forward to July 2015, and you'll still find a 30-pack in my fridge most weeks. The reason is because the old school cans make me feel like Rudy's dad.

Don't get me wrong. As far as the generic American pale lagers go, it's one of the better. But before the rebrand, I never gave a second thought to Miller Lite. Now I come home from work, crack open a can, and immediately get transported to a snowy night in Chicago, 1974, watching Monday Night Football on a 15-inch tube TV with my garbage kids and my plump Midwestern wife who resents me.

Plus, once you drink from a vented can, there's no going back.

## 1. OLD MILWAUKEE

One night, I stopped at a gas station and picked up a sixer of Old Milwaukee tallboys. I took the glorious red bastards up to the confused cashier. He scanned the barcode, but no beep registered. He asked where they came from, and I directed him to the top shelf of a neglected cooler. He swept away the cobwebs, searching for a price tag, but to no avail. Returning to the counter, he shrugged and punched in \$6.99.

As I walked to my truck, a wizened old homeless man approached with a cagey twinkle in his eye and a voice as rusty as an old tin can. He told me a story of when he was but a young man in the 1950s, and that particular stretch of Moreland Avenue was nothing but trees and a single six-pack of Old Milwaukee.

Over the years, the trees gave way to civilization, until eventually an Exxon was built right on top of that six-pack. Then the years turned to decades, and the young man grew old, and the only tree left was the gnarled oak that stood before me with a beard of hoarfrost.

I'll be G.D.ed if the sixer from his story wasn't the same one I held in my hands. It had gone all those years without anyone noticing except for him. The old man's eyes lit up with the fire of a thousand suns. He began manically jumping up and down and shouting, “Don't you see? The Old Milwaukee has always been here! It's the wind between the pines and the ancient stars that pierce the sky!” I gave him a suspicious look and opened one of the cans, pausing for a moment before I took a swig.

The world fell away from me, and slowly visions of a scorched earth came into view. I saw the Old Milwaukee in the gym busting out years of tearful, hate-filled reps until its enormous arms were perfectly sculpted for the singular purpose of punching a world that had scorned it. Reality set back in, and I wept for the end of innocence and the darkness in man's heart.

Now, I've always been of the belief that alcohol isn't for enjoying. You want a refreshing and delicious beverage? Drink a Coke. Alcohol is for one purpose only: putting lead in your pencil. That's why at \$14 a handle, Old Crow is the only liquor I've ever needed. Old Milwaukee, on the other hand, puts a lifetime of suppressed anguish in your pencil.

Old Milwaukee is the thread of melancholy that runs through that old tapestry of American experience. It's the existential dread of a nation kept alive only by the threat of mutually assured destruction. It's 1,000 trailers scattered across Tornado Alley. It's the ghost of the American Buffalo. It's Skylab tumbling back to earth. It's the disappointment of a world that didn't live up to its promise.

It's the most American beer there is.

Happy Fourth of July!