

MASTER WINEMAKER

Readers' views on

A letter on this topic from Mr. C. R. Wyness, of Chingford in our October issue has aroused a great deal of interest and comment Mr Wyness drew attention to the fact that under the present system adopted in most competitions, the title of "Master Winemaker" in many shows went to the person amassing the most points, and that it was quite possible for a winemaker showing wines of good quality in every class to achieve that without having a single first. He thought that this was something which should be discussed and remedied.

Mr. C. J. Hayden, of Alestone, Leicester, agrees with him:

I agree with Mr. Wyness' comments on the method of calculation of points for recognition as Master Winemaker at a show.

I am constantly suggesting that a better method would be to add all points scored by a competitor and divide by the number of bottles involved. Thus:

Entrant No.			
1	2	3	
2 bottles	3 bottles	4 bottles	
38 pts.	54 pts.	68 pts.	
1st method	3rd	2nd	1st
	19 pts.	18 pts	17 pts.
2nd method	1st	2nd	3rd

Incidentally what a smashing name minus the last "s". "C. R. WYNES—See our Wines"!

Has happened

And the former chairman of the National Association, Dr. R. A. Webb, of Long Ashton, observes:

I think that the possibility Mr. Wyness mentions, that a Master Winemaker might emerge who had no First Prizes, has already occurred in the

National, and there may well be a case for considering what is an appropriate achievement to associate with the designation "Master Winemaker".

The eight members of the AWNGJ who signed the letter in your October issue (p. 691) also raise a point of general importance. Their claim that "it is most unfair to a competitor entering a bottle in an extremely large class to have, say, only a 1 in 200 or so chance of getting first prize when another competitor entering a very small class could have as good as a 1 in 20 chance" has, if true, rather far-reaching implications.

The essence of the judge's function is the elimination of chance in the selection of prizewinners in a class, and the lottery-type odds your correspondents suggest only arise under certain conditions. The first condition is where the judge has little or no appreciation of quality. With competent judges the odds do not occur, as can be seen if one considers the following example: Imagine a judge has selected the best from a class of 200. Now withdraw 180 bottles (but not including the winner) and let the judge repeat the selection. Obviously a good judge (who has the essential ability to repeat a judgement) will produce the same winner from the class of 20. When a judge knows his (or her) job the best wine wins, no matter how many, or few, there are in the class. The task is less arduous in a smaller class, but the winner's odds are not affected by numbers. However, with a poor judge the lottery condition supervenes.

There is another set of conditions under which the odds suggested could arise even with a good judge. This condition is that entries to The National do not represent the best wines

available, but are a purely random selection from a very large range of wines. In this case the winner of a class of 200 is likely to be better than the winner of a class of 20, but the operative words are "only likely". In this case the winner of a class in The National has no claim to superiority over the winner of a class of similar size in a Regional Show.

Without knowing exactly how judges are elected it is unwise to comment on their quality, but it will be apparent that if judges are selected on ability to detect faults rather than ability to assess quality, their appraisal of a winning order amongst wines free from faults might be suspect and could inadvertently give rise to the situation your correspondents rightly regard as unfair.

It will be apparent to those who have given thought to the aim and progress of The National that two aspects are in urgent need of attention. The first is the need to eliminate the inferior wines whose entry are a serious embarrassment by virtue of their numbers, and the second is to make an independent examination of the quality of judges. Progress depends on the quality of the judging and will be slow or absent if there is an element of chance in the outcome when the best in a class is being determined.

Coping with, or reducing, entries

Mr. Edwin Plant, a member of the National Executive, has some personal views on this topic, too:

From time to time your correspondence columns raise two allied problems—judging and the volume/quality of entries. Inevitably, these problems are considered at all levels but because of

—BUT NO FIRSTS!

topics of the day

an over-vaunted “democratic” system no effective solution at National level has been attempted.

It is recognised by thoughtful people that (a) the “first” is little different from the second and third and that a Master Winemaker can legitimately earn the title without a “first”, and (b) that criticism of over-all standards at each National cannot be lightly dismissed.

On page 691 your eight signatories state a case but offer no solution. The National will only be the cream of amateur wine (anything less is almost an insult to the judges and the National!) if the Executive grasps the nettle of over-subscription (popular classes) and LIMITS ENTRIES. This may mean making demands on the Regions and it will certainly mean that some Regions will have to rationalise on boundaries etc. Also, if the National is to represent the nation the schedule must include some open classes with trophy classes restricted to winemakers who have shown, in some way, an acceptable standard. Also, the entry fee should be the market value.

All this will raise an hysterical and largely irrelevant outcry. The Executive has been given a mandate to lead and govern. It seems to me desirable that the Executive should be given an unequivocal lead so I submit the following resolution for their consideration at Harrogate.

“The National Committee is instructed to implement a system which will maintain the National as the premier show for all winemakers in the country while (a) reducing the number of very poor quality wines and (b) reducing the total entries in each class to correspond with the capacity of a conscientious judge.”

This will certainly mean more administration but, as I have so often

re-iterated, the National Committee exists to govern a movement at National level and NOT exclusively to pre-occupy itself with a “peripatetic show”.

First N.A.A.W. Symposium

A large number of interested winemakers gathered at Cowley for the first National Symposium, dealing with some of the more fundamental chemistry of winemaking. Possibly the fear of being offered too much science all at once dissuaded some people from attending, but they need have had no such worries—the weather was excellent, the talks helpful, the venue (the PSF ballroom) superb, and the whole day quite delightful.

The four lectures given during the day were interspersed with several breaks for the renewal of friendships, and although the bulk of the day's business was "The Chemist looks at his Wine", none of the chemists looked too deeply, and the opportunity for winemakers to meet together and talk about their hobby was as irresistible and as beneficial as ever.

After a formal welcome to the National Association by Mr. Wallin, Chairman of P.S.F. Circle, a paper was presented on "The Flavours of Wine" by Mr. M. D. Howlett, A.R.I.C. Mr. Howlett has been a successful winemaker for many years, but for some unaccountable reason is a newcomer to the public platform. It became evident with his opening sentences that he knows his subject well and is able to present his knowledge on flavours and tastes very lucidly. He explained the current theories on the nature of taste, and the relative susceptibility of the human palate. The sensation of saltiness could be detected only in a $\frac{1}{2}$ % solution, whereas bitterness could be detected in concentrations as low as 1 part in two million. The primary sources of flavour in wines were considered, i.e. from the ingredients themselves, from the yeast and its decay products, and from the various products of maturation such as glycerol and the numerous possible esters. Finally, Mr. Howlett outlined his recommendations for producing wines of excellent flavour, particularly emphasising the necessity for using the best quality ingredients, and making some palate assessment of this quality before making the wine itself.

TITRATION

Dr. R. A. Webb, of Long Ashton's, talk on the measurement and control of acidity began with a battle between himself and the amplifying equipment—a battle which the equipment lost as it soon gave up the competition and remained silent. Acidity, Dr. Webb reminded everyone, was a fundamental characteristic of fruit, and it varied considerably in the many fruits used by the winemaker. He considered the various acids which are found in fruits, and listed the special advantages of tartaric acid, particularly its ability to deposit excess acidity out of the wine under suitable conditions. The audience was then treated to a demonstration of the very simplest of titration techniques, carried out rapidly and accurately with a wineglass and a teat pipette. Such a simplified technique could be carried out easily by any winemaker, and would undoubtedly lead to a constancy in the quality of his finished wines.

TANNIN

After a most enjoyable luncheon, Mr. Philip Delmon presented a paper entitled "The Trouble with Tannins". Mr. Delmon's research work in the leather industry, and a post-graduate research programme into the chemistry of the tannins makes him well qualified to deal with this most difficult subject. As he pointed out in his opening remarks, he has acquired a reputation as a humorous speaker and very rarely gets the opportunity to present a serious lecture to an adult audience. It was to his credit, and to the great pleasure of those present that he very ably dealt with this obscure branch of winemaking chemistry. Extremely few of the published works on wine make more than a brief reference to the very necessary tannin content of wine. Mr. Delmon explained what the tannins were, what effects they had on the palate (some only temporary, but others more long lasting), their close relationship to the colouring matters in wine, and finally, some of the methods he has been using for experi-

mental work on the tannin content of wines, and of a certain proprietary brand of tea.

His experiments have shown that there is no direct relationship between the actual tannin content of a wine and acceptability by the palate. However, the take-up of tannin by a suitable protein material did relate very much more closely to the palate acceptability, and this method was already showing more meaningful results.

MATURING

Finally, Dr. John Harrison, with the help of numerous graphs and other visual aids illustrated the changes taking place in a wine over a period of time. He explained why adjustment of the various sensory factors must be made at an early stage, preferably during the making of the must, if the wine was ever to be exactly right. As the tannin and acidity decreased with time, so the ester content increased and bouquet improved. The bouquet in fact, continued to improve with time so that, even if a wine was "over the top" in one sense, the bouquet would still be excellent. A heavy fruit content was certainly advantageous for any wine which is made with the intention of keeping for a long time.

Towards the end of the afternoon, Mr. Ken Hill, Chairman of the National Association chaired a session at which all four lecturers answered questions from the floor. Both the wide variety of the questions and the detailed attention given to the replies showed that the day had been a definite success. This was confirmed by Mr. B. C. A. Turner, President of the Association when he thanked the speakers, the organisers, and the P.S.F. Wine Circle.

Our observer commented that this seems to be just the sort of venture the N.A.A.W. should be undertaking, and if possible repeating in various parts of the country so that the very widest audience can be reached.

Well done, N.A.A.W., in providing this day.