



## Spire: Britannia Cream Ale

Rating: ★★★★★ (5 of 5 possible stars)

👑 **Rule Britannia!** by [tange](#) - written on 17.9.2007

**Advantages** Strong, full of flavour and well balanced beer

**Disadvantages** May be too strong for some

I like trying new beers! That goes without saying...but, more importantly I like trying beers from local breweries. This is not always as easy as it sounds - most local pubs are tied to national breweries or pub companies and are often not allowed to stock locally produced products. So, when a new local free house opened - with a free rein to stock whatever beers it chooses - I was really pleased. This new pub was also leased by the people who run one of my local breweries, so there was also the chance to regularly get some of their beers. So, we duly got the bus over to see what was on offer over the Bank Holiday weekend. This is when we came to be drinking Britannia Cream Ale in The Britannia, Tupton!

**THE BREWERY** - Spire Brewery was officially opened by the mayor of Chesterfield in April 2006. They are based on a new industrial estate in Staveley, near Chesterfield, Derbyshire. The brewery is located in two adjacent industrial units - the brewhouse is in one unit, and the other houses a fermenting room, a chilled conditioning area and a small bar. Spire brew a range of interesting beers and, in a short time, have already begun to win awards and be recognised for their quality and range.

Some of the beers you will come across (especially if you join me for a pint at The Britannia) are Sgt. Pepper Stout (a wonderful full bodied stout made with ground pepper at 5.5% ABV), Land of Hop and Glory (a golden hoppy beer at 4.5% ABV) and Nocturne Porter (a smooth coffee flavoured porter at 5.7% ABV).

As well as at the Britannia you can find their beers at a number of pubs, especially in the Derbyshire, Yorkshire and Staffordshire areas, bottled direct from the brewery (see website [www.spirebrewery.co.uk](http://www.spirebrewery.co.uk) for details) and at beer festivals nationwide. Look out for them in free houses and at pubs that are members of the SIBA (Small Independent Brewers Association) scheme.

### THE BEER

**\*\*\*A Bit of Background\*\*\*** The three people who run Spire Brewery all have musical backgrounds so most of their beers have a musically themed name. For example, you can have a pint of Sgt. Pepper Stout, Ruby Tuesday Mild, Overture and Whiter Shade of Pale. Britannia Cream Ale, however, takes its inspiration from a steam train. The beer was first brewed for the Barrow Hill Rail Ale Festival, where Britannia was the name of the train that the beer stillage was placed against - when they saw a pub called The Britannia up for lease a while later that was just a happy coincidence! It is also good that there is also the musical connection with the song Rule Britannia!

**\*\*\*Vital Stats\*\*\*** Britannia Cream Ale weighs in at 6.4% ABV and is brewed in the style of a strong IPA - with the addition of German Tettnang hops to add a German twist to the recipe! For those who aren't sure, an IPA (which stands for India Pale Ale) is traditionally the hoppiest the pale beer styles, brewed for export to the colonies - especially India. They were brewed to be stronger and have large amounts of hops to preserve them to survive the lengthy ocean journey from the U.K.

**\*\*\*Look, Aroma and Texture\*\*\*** Britannia Cream is an amber gold coloured beer with a long lasting off-white head. Aroma is quite malty, with a decent amount of fruit (mainly oranges) and a hint of spice and a floral tinge. Texture is quite syrupy, smooth and full-bodied. It smells and tastes strong - it is honest about its strength - and has a nice creamy mouthfeel.

**\*\*\*Tange's Taste Test\*\*\*** Taste wise, Britannia Cream is a strong pale ale. Predominant flavours are bitter hops, smooth roasted malt and an orange fruit flavour - a little like a good bitter marmalade. This is also combined with a slight spiciness and a good dash of dark vine fruit - reminiscent of the alcohol hit you get from a wine. This leads to a warming yet dry finish and aftertaste that is bitter/sweet and quite long lived.

**WHAT I THINK.** - For a beer this strong Britannia is dangerously drinkable! It is certainly strong and you can definitely tell after a couple of pints that you really shouldn't have any more. It is really tasty though and full of complex layers of flavours that blend well to produce a classy beer. The fruit and spice flavours work really well with a bitter hops and roasty malt. It is a nice consistency and has a good mouthfeel - the creamy smoothness prevents the syrupy element becoming sickly and cloying. It is a well crafted example of a strong IPA, but it is also that little bit different too.

I had my last pint of BCA at the Britannia in Tupton where it cost me £2.40 a pint. I have also tried it in bottles and it gets more flavoursome (and perhaps stronger) with age - if the bottle lasts that long! It is a really nice beer, but not one to drink for a whole night - perhaps end with one as a nightcap. The warming flavour makes it a nice winter ale; as does the orange and spice taste - pretty Christmassy!

If your local doesn't stock it, ask them to give it a go...supporting small local businesses is a great idea and will encourage drinkers to try new things. As long as you remember to treat this beer with the respect it deserves, and bear in mind that it IS a stronger beer than most beers you will see on a British pub bar, you will love BCA and find it a pleasant and tasty drink. It goes down well and is surprisingly easy to drink!