

# Boutique brewing

**GREG THOM** tries an ale invented by engineers

WHAT would a bunch of engineers know about making beer? Enough to believe they could brew their own at the back of their Thornbury business.

If 3 Ravens Blonde is anything to go by, they've done a pretty good job.

What began as a hobby project 18 months ago has grown into a fledgling boutique brewery that is slowly but surely getting its product to punters.

Blonde is the first of the outfit's efforts to appear in packaged form. Described as a "malty, full-bodied brew with strong fruit notes and an appetising aroma", the 5.5 per cent Continental Ale is a honey-coloured drop made from a blend of three barley malts and Saaz hops from Bohemia.

It's an interesting beer, with a complex flavour that tends to compete against itself in a struggle to establish a unique character. It does mount a nice tart assault on the back of the tongue, though.

Brewer Marcus Cox says the Blonde is a bit different in that it contains ingredients usually associated with lager.

"But we ferment it with an ale yeast, which gives it its fruitiness and robustness."

Cox, whose background is in the hospitality industry, was brought in six months ago to oversee the brewing and marketing operation.

He says 3 Ravens is a microbrewery in every sense of the word. The craft brewing operation is capable of producing no more than 300 litres at a time — a scale too small to support commercial distribution.

In order to expand, the company has a contract to brew much larger quantities of beer once a month at Paul Holgate's brewery in Woodend. This is overseen by Cox.

The arrangement allows 3 Ravens to at least distribute its product until it can expand its own operation by the end of next year.

Blonde is now spreading from the northern suburbs to specialty liquor outlets, such as Nick's Wine Merchants in the city. It can also be found on tap.

A bottled version of 3 Ravens Black, an Oatmeal Stout, should be ready in a couple of weeks, and White, a traditional Belgian Witbier-style beer, is expected to be available by Christmas.



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