

Sip something new for summer

Lighten up with Stella Artois or take on the Black Fly vodka coolers; there's plenty there to sample

BY JOANNE SASVARI

Summertime, and the drinking is easy. It's that time of year when summer sippers are launched to appeal to thirsty consumers. And this month, B.C. Liquor Stores are simply sloshing over with new beers, ciders, coolers and spirits.

Possibly the most welcome newcomer is Stella Artois Légère, a lightened-up version of the classic Belgian lager.

"Our research revealed that consumers are looking for a beer that combines the sophistication of an import with the benefits of a light beer," Paul van de Walle, Stella Artois' Belgium-based brew master, said in an e-mail interview.

At four per cent alcohol by volume (ABV), rather than original Stella's 5.2 per cent, he says, "Stella Artois Légère will appeal to lifestyle-minded beer enthusiasts who don't want to compromise on quality and taste."

Unlike many light beers that seem to remove flavour along with the alcohol, the pale golden Stella Artois Légère has a distinct fruitiness with a notable hop note that pairs well with summer's lighter foods.

And, with its lower alcohol content, it's a beer you can enjoy on a patio without that woozy feeling you get from

drinking alcohol under the hot sun. This isn't the first new product Stella Artois has introduced since it began producing its pilsner-style lager back in 1926. Last year, for instance, the company introduced Stella Artois Nobilis, a delicate sparkling beer — a barley champagne, if you will.

But tinkering with a brew as beloved as Stella does not come without its risks.

"The biggest challenge while developing Stella Artois Légère was to develop a Stella Artois with a lower ABV without compromising on the sophisticated taste profile of Stella Artois," van de Walle said.

So far, "the response has been incredible. The feedback has been that Stella Artois Légère is unlike any other light beer on the market — that it truly delivers on the taste and quality that you've come to expect from Stella Artois."

Stella Artois Légère will be arriving in B.C. Liquor Stores this week, and a six-pack will retail for \$12.35. For more info, visit www.stellartois.com.

Some other new products to look for this month:

Hangar One vodka (www.hangarone.com): Spirits aficionados are excited to see this hand-crafted, ultra-premium U.S. vodka arriving in B.C. It's pot distilled from Viognier wine and made,

as the name suggests, in an old airplane hangar. It should be hitting fine restaurants and B.C. Liquor Stores any day now, retailing at \$59.99 a bottle.

Black Fly vodka coolers (www.blackflycoolers.com): Not your sticky-sweet hangover in a bottle, these are premium vodka coolers made in Canada with real fruit juice, such as the popular cranberry-blueberry. Although not all products may be available here yet, the line includes ready-to-freeze Black Fly Vodka Infused Spiked Ice — yep, popsicles for grownups. A four-pack of coolers retails for \$11.50.

Rock Creek Cider (www.bigrockbeer.com): It's the perfect marriage of Okanagan apples and Rocky Mountain water. This crisp, new, all-natural cider is produced by Calgary's Big Rock Brewery, and is designed to pair beautifully with summer's grilled meats. It retails for \$9.95 for a six-pack.

Limited edition tequilas: Tequila lovers have long been disappointed by the meager selection in our province, but now they have cause to celebrate: B.C. Liquor Stores have brought in a great selection of limited-edition bottles of the blue agave spirit.

Among them are the cult fave Cabo Wabo blanco (\$79.99), the complex Corazon reposado (\$90) and the blockbuster El Tesoro Paradiso anejo (\$120.95). Check them out at the B.C. Liquor Stores' website, www.mattersof taste.com.

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