

# Fighting fit: Breweries return in force as Liverpool Craft Beer Expo showcases UK beer industry

It was a tough pandemic for breweries – but if Liverpool Craft Beer Expo was anything to go by, then things are starting to look up.

Drinkers have been pouring into Liverpool's Black Lodge Brewery this weekend for this year's festival, which showcased drinks from breweries across the UK and as far afield as Ukraine.

Last year's event [was held mid-pandemic](#) and marked the Mersey beer industry's return to live events after more than a year of enforced closures.

Almost a year later, with social restrictions now lifted, BusinessLive went back to the festival to speak to breweries about how their industry was doing.

Julie O'Grady founder and co-owner of Maghull's Neptune Brewery alongside her husband Les, said the firm had made a "pretty decent" recovery from the pandemic.

She said: "We've got a lot more customers now since we came out of the pandemic, people who actually tried our beer. They had not heard of Neptune before.

"When we were doing deliveries during the pandemics, people were contacting us afterwards saying that they tried our beer, and they wanted it in draft.

"We're back to more or less normality. We're brewing a lot more even than we did pre-pandemic, which is fantastic.

Onwards and upwards.”

Neptune has also added staff since June, including a delivery driver who helps Neptune deliver across the North. Their beers are sold nationwide too via distributors.

Julie says working at a hometown beer festival is always special.

“Today is great for us – it’s all personal, because obviously it’s our home city.

“To be able to pour in your home city, catch up with people that we know and the customers that we deal with, and to get a lot more new customers out as well – It’s great, we love it.”

Wrestling-themed brewery Top Rope was founded five and a half years ago and is now based in Bootle.

Neil Rothwell, co-founder and head of sales at Top Rope, said the favourite beer he was selling at the festival was his 6.2% IPA Head of the Table - “it’s like drinking a cloud of pineapple”.

He said: “Myself and Ben, the two founders, we are big wrestling fans. We originally met at homebrew club, bonded over our love of wrestling and homebrew beer, and just kind of fell into it.

“If you’re starting a brewery. It’s good to have a little bit of a bit of a niche a bit of a thing to build it around. And obviously, wrestling and sports and beer, they all go really well together. So we found that wrestling works because there was no one doing that kind of thing. So we’re able to build up and start from there.”

Neil said the market post-Covid was still unclear.



Liverpool Craft Beer Expo 2022 at Black Lodge Brewery,  
Liverpool

(Image: Reach)

He said: "It's interesting to say the least.

"Pre pandemic, you could plan things out. You could see where things were going. But currently, there's no rhyme or reason. It's very sporadic.

"So we're all fighting the same issues. But it's an interesting thing to be a part of.

"I get to do something I love for a living, I get to make and drink beer for a living. That's fantastic. And anybody who buys the beer – thanks to all of you guys.

"As anybody who owns their own business knows every day is a challenge. You've just to take it on the chin and just see

where things go”

Paul Seiffert, one of the organisers of the festival, was pleased to be able to welcome people back to Black Lodge.

He said: “It’s been interesting this year because obviously COVID restrictions have been lifted. We’ve found it, tricky marketing it and selling the tickets as still the appetite isn’t quite there for for getting out.

“But now we’re open and it’s great. We’re really happy that we could pull it off again this year.”

Mr Seiffert said the reaction from breweries had been “really good”.

He said: “Everyone’s keen to get back out in an unrestricted environment because last year, obviously we had to restrict numbers and respect space and everything like that. So it’s nice to be able to do a proper festival.”

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