

# BOURBON

## and Horse Racing

WHAT'S THE CONNECTION?  
A LITTLE HISTORY HELPS.

Edwin Malet

**B**OURBON IS ABOUT TWO AND A half centuries old, distilled from corn, grown mostly in Kentucky. In the late 18th and early 19th century, Kentucky's frontier families would grow corn, distill it, put it in wooden barrels — ultimately, new charred oak barrels — and float it down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers on flatboats to New Orleans. The journey might take a year. But the business was good.

Afterwards, as the distillers prepared to travel back upriver, they'd confront a problem, really two problems. First, they couldn't paddle their flatboats back upstream. The Mississippi, which had eased the passage to New Orleans, flows only one way, so the flatboats had to be sold or scrapped.

Second, the land route back to Kentucky — the so-called Natchez Trace (through what's now Mississippi and Tennessee) — was considered dangerous, populated with peoples set on taking the recently acquired cash ... and perhaps scalps.

You'd need a horse. A fast horse. The fastest horse. And those horses ended up in Kentucky. Even after steamboats began to ply the rivers in the 1820s, the relationship between Kentucky's horses and bourbon was born.

Today, at equestrian events around the country, you're sure to find bourbon. Here are a few ideas on how to enjoy this quintessentially American drink.



### STRAIGHT BOURBON

#### Simplicity

Drinking bourbon "neat," some say, is the only way to drink bourbon. Invariably, these fans express a preference. Woodford Reserve is the official brand of the Kentucky Derby. It's very good, but maybe that's mainly marketing. Buffalo Trace, Bulleit, Four Roses, Knob Creek, Maker's Mark, Jack Daniels, Wild Turkey and so many others, including the coveted Pappy Van Winkle, all have their advocates.

In general, look for one that has some age: 25 years is not unheard of, four years is the minimum, two years to be legally called bourbon. Look for "smooth," but be aware that different distillers strive for different notes.

Try different brands. Pour it over rocks, if you dare or it's a hot day.

Sip. Savor. It's like fine brandy. And takes no prep time!



### KENTUCKY DERBY BOURBON PUNCH

#### For the Crowd

Derby day can be quite hot. And the crowd can get excited. A cold punch can be just the thing. The key ingredients to cool them down? Bourbon, of course. Plus some citrus. And ice. This punch recipe makes about 16 glasses.

Proportions can be modified. In particular, you can go heavier on the bourbon.

- 1 qt. bourbon
- 12 oz. (1 can) frozen orange juice concentrate
- 12 oz. (1 can) frozen lemonade concentrate
- ¼ C. lemon juice
- ¼ C. maraschino cherry juice
- 1½ qt. club soda
- 1 lemon, sliced
- ½ C. maraschino cherries, halved
- Rosemary for garnish (optional)
- Ice

Thaw orange juice and lemonade. Pour in punch bowl.

Add bourbon, lemon and cherry juice. Stir until well-mixed.

Add club soda, lemon slices and maraschino cherries. Garnish with rosemary if desired.

Serve in ice-filled glasses.



### OLD FASHIONED

#### A Modern Choice

The old fashioned is the classic gentleman's drink. Despite countless variations, it basically requires three elements: sweetness (e.g., sugar, maple syrup, demerara syrup), bitters (e.g., cinchona bark, gentian root, cranberry, lemon, orange peel, herbs) and spirits (preferably bourbon, but other whiskeys can substitute). These three elements must be balanced, one not overpowering the others.

Here's a classic recipe, invented in Louisville.

- 2 tsp. simple syrup
- 2 dashes bitters
- 1 tsp. water
- 1 C. ice cubes
- 1 jigger (1½ oz.) bourbon whiskey
- 1 slice of orange or lemon
- 1 maraschino cherry

In a mixing glass, add syrup and bitters. Stir.

Then add the water. Stir some more. Add bourbon to a glass with ice cubes. Stir until chilled.

Pour the mixture over ice cubes in an old-fashioned glass.

Express the orange or lemon. Drop it in the glass.

Garnish with the cherry.



### MINT JULEP

#### The Classic

In 1877, Polish actress Helena Modjeska, a guest of Meriwether Lewis Clark, Jr., owner of Churchill Downs, was offered a mint julep at the Kentucky Derby. Her julep was meant to be passed around among the guests, but she drank it all. And she ordered — and drank — two more. Afterwards, Clark had mint planted all around the racetrack. Today, about 120,000 mint juleps are sold at each Kentucky Derby.

**Tip:** A mint julep is best served in a silver or silver-plated julep cup.

- Fresh mint leaves, about 8
- ¼ oz. simple syrup
- 2 oz. bourbon
- Finely crushed ice
- Bitters
- Mint spring for garnish

Muddle the mint in syrup (tap gently to release the mint's aromatic oils, then swab the sides of the cup with the mint leaves).

Pack finely crushed ice into a silver cup. Add bourbon, stir until cup is frosted.

Add more ice, forming a dome on cup. Serve with a straw, plus more mint for garnish.