Crisp from the orchard

As the UK's largest independently owned cider maker, Aston Manor Cider is dedicated to producing quality products from orchard to glass.

Established in February 1983, Aston Manor Cider, a family-owned business, is also the country's second largest cider manufacturer overall. The company produces a diverse range of cider brands from four modern production facilities including three in the West Midlands; a fruit pressing and processing mill in Stourport-on-Severn, a production and packaging facility in Aston and a logistics and warehousing hub in Witton, plus a further production and packaging facility in Tiverton, Devon. Aston Manor also has orchards in Worcestershire and Herefordshire.

Although 95 per cent of its ciders are currently sold in the UK, Aston Manor Cider enjoys sales in as many as 20 countries around the world and its global export presence continues to grow.

"Being a family-owned business gives Aston Manor Cider the advantage of being able to plan for longer-term growth. We have greater control over business decisions and are focused on sustainability," reveals Managing Director, Gordon Johncox. "The company's passion and dedication to making quality products and providing excellent customer service, coupled with the ambition to be recognised as the most capable and progressive cider company, is driven by the business owners and is shared by everyone within the organisation. The strong commitment to the success of the cider category and the future growth of the company filters down from the business owners to all our employees."

Indeed, throughout its history Aston Manor Cider has worked to further enhance the growth of the business and the development of
its cider products. The company is presently undergoing a major investment plan that will enhance its production and processing facilities, including an investment of £3 million to increase capacity and capability. In total the investment plan is worth around £50 million over a decade.

As part of this, in spring 2013 the business announced the planting of 1000 acres of additional orchards while also agreeing several 25-year contracts with its farming and growing partners.

Furthermore, in order to support further growth in the company, Aston Manor Cider announced a multi-million pound deal to create an outstanding logistics facility in July 2014 at a new site in Witton, just three miles from its main production site. “We have invested heavily over the past four or five years in our manufacturing capability and capacity. As part of a significant investment programme, we have focused on enhancing our operations across our production sites to help us become more sustainable to support wider company growth. The new equipment and initiatives we've introduced this year alone will help reduce waste, save energy and will make us even more efficient,” Gordon says.

“Another significant investment that we are proud of this year is our extended relationship with the Rugby Football League and in England Rugby League, giving us a great platform for consumer engagement with our flagship cider, Kingstone Press.” The cider is now the principle partner of England Rugby League, an agreement that covers two major international tournaments, the Four Nations later this year and the World Cup in 2017.

**Extensive portfolio**
Further to its flagship Kingstone Press brand, Aston Manor Cider takes pride in being the only producer that offers a high quality cider that meets the unique requirements of every consumer and occasion. Its extensive portfolio spans the breadth of the cider category from mainstream ciders through to premium brands, which are all available in a variety of different packaging formats.

“Aston Manor Cider has made significant investments in new product development this year to enable us to manage our brand portfolio and expand into new areas. Premium cider is experiencing a surge in growth, thanks to the rising consumer interest in provenance and quality. This led to us putting increased investment into the premium end of our portfolio,” Gordon explains. “We have developed our craft cider range under the Friels First Press Vintage Cider (7.4 per cent abv) brand to include new packaging formats and flavour variants. Friels First Press Vintage is made in small batches with 100 per cent fresh apples from the first press of juice from a variety of dessert apples delivering a fantastically fruity, light-bodied yet full-flavoured craft cider. Great for consumers looking for an authentic cider, it is available in 20l bag-in-box, 500ml glass bottle and now a stylish 330ml can. A hops-infused variant has also been added to the range, offering a unique and refreshing flavour profile.”

**BRC Accreditation**
In addition to its continued investment into new facilities and increasing its product portfolio, Aston Manor Cider was recently awarded an ‘AA’ rating at its Stourport cider mill and an AA* rating at both its production and packaging sites in Tiverton and Aston by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) meaning that all of its production locations now have the highest possible accreditations for quality of operations.

While the cider market may have suffered in recent years, Aston Manor Cider continues to enjoy growing success and is set to look to new markets in the near future. “UK cider sales have fallen in the last two years and whilst we’re not immune to prevailing market conditions, Aston Manor is doing better than the category as a whole. Though cider has declined as a total category there continues to be opportunities for growth, especially within the premium cider sector which as a category is experiencing the strongest rate of growth,” Gordon concludes. “Whilst the drinks industry will remain very challenging, we anticipate that we will continue to outperform the market over the next 12 months. We're pleased with how we have improved the mix of business we do and that we are able to invest to support the future success we expect to see at home and abroad.”

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