

## **MMA 2017- A Jury Report**

Since 1997, the malt maniacs (an international collective of malt whisky enthusiasts) have been enjoying and discussing the pleasures of (single malt) whisky with like-minded whiskylovers from all over the world. Since 2003, we have organised (non stop) our very own annual 'amateur' whisky competition. We like to think that, over the years, our modest little initiative has evolved into one of the leading (and most independent) whisky competitions in the world. You can find more details about our collective and its history on: [www.maltmaniacs.net](http://www.maltmaniacs.net)

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Dear fellow whisky lover,

You find before you, the jury report of the 15th edition of our annual Malt Maniacs Awards competition. With about 170+ samples on this year's menu, the task was not easy on the noses, palates and livers of the jurors although this time we have taken three full months to do the same. As you know the judges are no younger than they were a decade and half ago!!

So, without further ado we'd like to present MMA 2017.

The Malt Maniacs Awards (MMA2017) has been intense with most judges including myself struggling with tasting all the samples in less than 3 months. Not only the end of the year is rich in whisky fairs and other whisky events, but also with the daily business of Malt Maniacs (MM) judges. As you all know by this time, the MMA is all about blind tasting. Besides personal work and their family activities tasting in spare time and assigning "true" score to a malt whisky is a challenging task. Many a time I am sure, the judge leaves the tasting table and ponders over "have I given correct score to that sample? Should I taste it once again"? Thus, to ensure the best quality review of the participants and to reduce the number of "premature discontinuation", the judges have decided to extend this period to 6 months (i.e., publishing the results in March instead of December).

Last year there was an aberration in the competition, as the number of entries from a certain distillery from Taiwan represented more than 10% of all whiskies and to avoid this embarrassment this year we had to tweak our rules to limit the number of entries from a single distillery. Now all is well, it seems!!

As Keith Wood, our maniac from Munich retired from the organisation last year, all the logistics was conducted by a single MM (i.e., myself): sending the invitations, replying to all e-mails (almost 750!), ordering the samples, renting a storehouse, collecting the parcels, filling the samples and sending the samples to the judges. I must thank my fellow Swiss MM Patrick De Schulthess who provided me some very welcome help to fill a fair number of samples.

## **MMA 2017: The Rules**

**Our fundamentals are:**

- 100% Amateur
- 100% Blind

As we had to rent storage and used a postal service for the receipt of the parcels coming from the European Union, a small fee was charged for all entries, with any excess to be paid to charities. Unfortunately, due to high commission fees going to PayPal (up to 10%) and fluctuating cross currency rates against Euro, we ended up with a small loss.

All the costs for the samples and their shipment were at the expense of the judges. In total excluding import duties, each judge paid over 2500 CHF/USD. However some individual judges from Asia ended up paying more than Euro 500 from their pockets!!

The participants have the freedom of sending us any whiskies, including vatted malts or single grains, from any type of casks, peated or unpeated.

For MMA2017 a total of 9 judges initially volunteered to judge the samples. Unfortunately one had to abandon midway due to private reasons. With judges participating from far corners of the world, with varied complexities of situations besides complexities of individual organoleptic capabilities, winning a medal in MMA is not an easy task.

**The Categories:**

Many other whisky competitions have dozens of different categories, but we don't roll that way...All bottles in our whisky competition fall into one of the three different 'price brackets' below. However, please note that most bottlings are available in various countries with different tax and pricing structures. This means that the 'street prices' of whiskies could vary between countries and between (web)shops. The three different price brackets in the Malt Maniacs Awards are:

- Daily dram (recommended retailing price (RRP) up to 50 euros)
- Premium (from <50 to 150 euros)
- Ultra-premium (<150 euros)

The price was based on the RRP provided by the participants at the time of the submission (August-September 2017).

Jurors

MMA2017 had following judges on the tasting team - and all managed to finish their noble duty on time!

<b>Abbreviation &amp; Name</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Certified malt maniac since</b>
1. RK = Robert Karlsson	Sweden	2006

2. KG = Konstantin Grigoriadis	Austria	2007
3. KN = Krishna Nukala	India	2000
4. DW = David Wankel	U.S.A.	2009
5. PdS = Patrick De Schulthess	Switzerland	2010
6. BC = Benjamin Chen	Singapore	2011
7. PB= Patrick Brossard	Switzerland	2016
8. Luca Chichizola	Italy	2004

## Awards

In the Malt Maniacs Awards, medals are won on merit, similar to the system that is used by the boy scouts. The winners in specific categories receive awards instead - hence the name of our competition. There are six award categories in three price brackets. We distinguish between these six awards categories:

- Non-Plus-Ultra Award (Overall top scoring whisky out of all Malt Maniacs Awards entries that year)
- Best Natural Cask Award (Best whisky matured exclusively in 'untreated', regular casks)
- Best Sherry Cask Award (Best whisky matured exclusively in sherry casks)
- Best Peated Malt Award (Best whisky distilled from - relatively - peated malted barley)
- Thumbs Up Award (Most exciting new release in that price category that year)

Every bottle that is entered in our competition can win only one award (as well as only one medal). Apart from the six awards categories listed above, there are three different price brackets –

Daily Drams (the bottles with a retail price of up to 50 Euros), Premium Whiskies (the bottles with a retail price between 50 and 150 Euros) and Ultra Premium Whiskies (the bottles with a retail price of more than 150 Euros). So there are 18 'standard' awards that are assigned each year - provided we can find a suitable candidate.

If we feel that a certain whisky, bottler or distillery deserves special recognition in a particular year, we sometimes add one or more 'special' awards.

All judges rate the whiskies on a scale from 0 to 100.

For a whisky to get a Gold Medal, it needs to reach a median score of 90 points, which naturally means they are considered as outstanding whiskies. A score of 85 to 89 is required to obtain a silver medal (excellent and highly recommended whiskies) and from 80 to 84 for a bronze medal (good every day drams).

### The MMA 2017 process:

The process started in April 2017 with e-mail sent to all the MM members to recruit judges. Between May and June, we went through the previous rules and decided on a few changes (see above). By June, several hundred importers, distillers, retailers, and bottlers were invited to the competition and between July and August, close to 100 parcels were collected, opened, their content listed and photographed. As I did not have enough space, I had to bring them to a storehouse, after recycling all the packaging material. The last bottles were received early September and filling was done late in the evening and during weekend. Finally, over 1000 samples were filled and labelled, repackaged and sent to the judges mid October, so that they could start their job.



All the scores were sent to our US judge for compilation and finally, a scorecard created and the results announced!

And finally, the moment you are waiting for.....!!!!

## AWARDS –Supreme Winner



Kavalan 2009/2017 'Solist' (58.60%, OB, C#S090306031, Sherry Cask, 481 Bts.)

## AWARDS - Ultra Premium Category



> Non-Plus-Ultra Award (Ultra Premium)

Glen Grant 1965 (43.6%, Gordon & MacPhail for LMDW, First Fill Sherry Cask, 19 Bts)

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> Best Natural Cask Award (Ultra Premium)

22yo 1993/2015 (52.70%, Chieftain's Choice, C#3612, First Fill Sherry Butt, 579 Bts.)

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> Best Sherry Cask Award (Ultra Premium).

Yamazaki 25yo (43%, OB, Sherry)

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> Best Peated Malt Award (Ultra Premium)  
Islay Distillery 25yo (48.7%, That Boutique-y Whisky Company)

> Thumbs Up Award (Ultra Premium)  
Glenfarclas 10yo 2005/2015 (60.9%, OB, C#2424, Sherry Cask, 634 Bts.)

## AWARDS - Premium Category



> Non-Plus-Ultra Award (Premium)  
Kavalan 'Solist' 2008 (58.6%, OB, C#S081217041, Sherry Cask, 476 Bts.)

> Best Natural Cask Award (Premium)  
Edradour 11yo 2005/2016 (59.1%, OB for Drunken Master Bar, C#90, Sherry cask)

> Best Sherry Cask Award (Premium)  
Kavalan 2009/2017 'Solist' (58.60%, OB, C#S090306024, Sherry Cask, 461 Bts.)

> Best Peated Malt Award (Premium)  
Ledaig 12yo 2005/2017 (61.1%, Cadenhead's for HNWS Taiwan 12th Anniversary)

> Thumbs Up Award (Premium)  
Amrut 2011/2016 (56.50%, OB for Hot Malt, C#4122, PX Sherry Cask, 624 Bts.)

## AWARDS - Daily Drams Category



- > Non-Plus-Ultra Award (Daily Drams)  
Elements of Islay 'Peat Full Proof' (59.3%, Elixir Distillers, NAS)  
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- > Best Natural Cask Award (Daily Drams)  
Wemyss 'Treacle Chest' (46%, Wemyss Family Collection, First Fill Sherry Hogshead, 6300 Bts.)  
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- > Best Sherry Cask Award (Daily Drams)  
Glenfarclas 105 (60%, OB, Sherry Cask)  
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- > Best Peated Malt Award (Daily Drams)  
Caol Ila 12yo (43%, OB)  
.....
- > Thumbs Up Award (Daily Drams)  
Laphroaig 10yo (40%, OB)  
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## Gold Medals (GM)

Gold Medals as you all would agree are the cream of the crop! As mentioned earlier it is not easy to get a GM in MMA and the average GM winners per competition for last 14 years has been only eight!! The maximum of 15 were in the year 2006 with minimum being 3 in the inaugural year, 2003. So this year we are not far away from our average number, which are:

- 1.Kavalan 2009/2017 'Solist' (58.60%, OB, C#S090306031, Sherry Cask, 481 Bts.)
- 2.Kavalan 'Solist' 2008 (58.6%, OB, C#S081217041, Sherry Cask, 476 Bts.)
- 3.Edradour 11yo 2005/2016 (59.1%, OB for Drunken Master Bar, C#90, Sherry cask)
- 4.Glen Grant 1965 (43.6% Gordon &MacPhail for LMDW, First Fill Sherry Cask, 19 Bts)
- 5.Yamazaki 25yo (43%, OB, Sherry)
- 6.Kavalan 2009/2017 'Solist' (58.60%, OB, C#S090306024, Sherry Cask, 461 Bts.)
- 7.Ledaig 12yo 2005/2017 (61.1%, Cadenhead's for HNWS Taiwan 12th Anniversary)

8. Kavalan 2009/2016 'Solist' (57.10%, OB, C#S090306012, Sherry Cask, 498 Bts.)
9. Undisclosed 22yo 1993/2015 (52.70%, Chieftain's Choice, C#3612, First Fill Sherry Butt, 579 Bts.)
10. Amrut 2011/2016 (56.50%, OB for Hot Malt, C#4122, PX Sherry Cask, 624 Bts.)
11. Edradour 11yo 2004/2016 (57.6%, OB, C#426, 674 Bts.)
12. Glenlivet 2007 (66.6%, Signatory Vintage for Whisky Live 2017, C#900188, 343 Bts.)
13. Kavalan 2010/2017 'Solist' (59.40%, OB for LMDW C#0100505013A, Port Cask, 196 Bts.)

(NOTE: There is a pdf file to know the scores of all entries, which won some medal or other).

### Final words

The MMA cannot take place without the participating companies submitting their bottles to us. So, a big thank you to them!

The MMA2017 has been a very good year and as the next MMA will be the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the awards, so malt lovers, expect something special in MMA2018!!

**Patrick Brossard,**  
Organiser of the MMA 2017.

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### Judges' Comments

Here are some comments and feelings right from the horse's mouths about the tasting of individual samples in MMA2017. Tasting notes of individual judges reproduced as such.

*Krishna Nukala, Hyderabad, India*



**Sample No.199 (Yamazaki 25yo, OB, 43%, Sherry cask, 2016)**  
*Krishna thought while tasting that it was a Yamazaki. And it turned out to be so!!*



*Sherry Monster. Typical nose of a sherry bomber, all those dried fruits like raisins, plums, apricots etc, cinnamon, cloves, brandy cake-reminding me that Christmas is only 5 days away! Oh man- you can nose this all day long. Such richness!! On palate whatever said appears with bang. Mildly bitter, but hugely enjoyable with huge sherry finish. 92 points.*

**Sample No. 127 (Glen Grant, 1956, LMdW, 66.6%)**

*Blatant sherry. You get all those that accompany this kind of whisky. Do I get mild smoke, not sure??? Lots of tannins- mildly bitter similar to inner skin of a Pinot Noir... Very sweet and full bodied. Lovely enjoyable stuff with huge sherried finish 92 points*

**Sample No. 106 (Nantou 8 yo, 2009-2017, 58%, cask no. 21090936)**

*Complex nose, strong. beautiful fruity notes that are not blatant like a sherry monster but very enjoyable.. quality wood, may be a high aged whisky.. very dry, wood and lots of sweets, organics and several complexities on palate.. Bit salty too. Exceedingly long spicy, sweet and satisfying finish. 91 points.*

**Sample No. 124 (Glenlivet 2007, 58%, LMdW...)**

*Krishna predicted either 124 or 134 could be over all winners!*

*Very strong nose... Classic wood! Ahhh!!! Lots of complexities. You get all those dried fruits that accompany this kind of whisky. More than anything else the classic wood predominates- Cedar, sandalwood accompanied by lots of dry fruits. On palate- the act begins- very hot and spicy. Extremely sweet.... you get all those dried fruits, spices back.. Very long spicy finish. Classic!! 92 points*

**Sample no. 134 (Benriach 16 yo, 15/11/1999-July 2016, 59.3%, Oloroso Sherry butt No.2102, OB Excl for Sun favourite Co. Ltd, Taiwan)**

*Classy! You get all those rich dried fruits like raisins, figs, prunes. Christmas cake that is made extravagantly. Mace, Nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves etc etc... Oh my God, this has got such Ooomph! On palate very smooth, like velvet, all the richness and complexities experienced on nose display exactly on palate. Very spicy, hugely enjoyable. Everlasting spiciness, sweet and rich finish. Top Class stuff. (mild smoke on empty glass)- 92 points*

**Sample No. 27 (Bruichladdich 15 yo, 11/12/2001-05/2017, 58.6%, FFSK no. 888, Black Adder Raw Cask)**

*Looks like complex nose. Peaty whisky matured or finished in Sherry cask. Dry fruits, spices etc... some coastal salty notes. Actually salt liquorice. Very spicy, smoky and sweet. Actually hot. Not many complexities on palate but nevertheless very enjoyable. Hugely spicy, smoky finish. 90 points.*

**Sample no 19 (Amrut, NAS, 2011-16, 56.5%, PX Sherry cask no. 4122, OB for Hot Malt Co. Ltd, Taiwan)**

*Fruity notes of cask maturation... Dry fruits, nice salty asian spices, very drinkable.. Mild organics on palate.. full bodied.. Good spicy finish- 90 points.*

*Patrick Brossard, Basel, Switzerland*

This was an excellent year and I was delighted in having the opportunity of tasting new comers such as the Danish of FaryLochan, independent bottlings of the Scotch Malt Whisky Society, the Swiss from Acla da Fans, and probably a few more newcomers that I might have forgotten... The MMA provides a good overview of the whiskies produced and bottled all around the world, from very small companies to large corporations.

*So, my personal favourites from this year were:*



**Hakushu 25 YO(43%, OB)**

*An excellent whisky combining complex fruity flavours and some aromatic peat smoke. The balance is impressive and the mouth feel simply superb. I love it!*

**Berrys' Finest Blended Scotch WhiskyAGED 40 Years, Berry Bros & Rudd, 46%.**

*Another excellent whisky, mellow, very complex, with delicious old fashioned flavours, including rich fruity flavours, aromatic herbs and some tree sap. This reminds me of some of the finest Speyside and Highland malts from the 1960s. And yes, we can have blends at the MMA!*

**Glenfarclas 10 YO 2005/2015 (60.9%, OB, C#2424)**

*A whisky at the peak of its maturation, complex, rich, floral spicy, from the finest sherry cask. The balance is impressive. Excellent. When quality is not always a question of age.*

**Millstone American Oak 20 YO 1996/2017 (51.45%, OB, C#1376)**

*Impression: A delicious sherried whisky that reminds the some of best Speyside whiskies distilled in the 1960s, with a mixture of precious wood, tree sap and various spices. Simply excellent. I had the impression that the American sherry oak provided a nice creamy influence. Zuidam distillers know how to make high quality whiskies.*

**Strathisla 'The Distillery Reserve Collection' 13yo 2003/2017 (58.3, OB, C#62274, Sherry Cask, 654 Bts.)**

*A delicious sweet and fruity whisky, with a most pleasant mouth feel, rich dried and sweet fruity flavours. From an excellent sherry cask bottled at the right time. I loved it. A sweet dark sherry whisky. I guess I will need to find a way to visit the distillery before it is sold out*

**GlenDronach 13 YO 2003/2017 (58.7%, OB for Taiwan, C# 5950)**

*An extremely well balanced whisky, very smooth and silky, on round sherry flavours and some exotic fruits. Simply excellent and remarkably intense.*

**Luca Chichizola, Italy**

Here are 5 of my favourites from this year... Bear in mind that I love heavy sherry, so it does reflect in my scores. These 5 may not be necessarily the absolute "best", but they certainly are the most interesting ones. Whiskies that may be slightly unbalanced, even, or atypical, but with a strong personality.



Sample #39 (Undisclosed 22yo 1993/2015 (52.70%, Chieftain's Choice, C#3612, First Fill Sherry Butt, 579 Bts.)

Still wondering which distillery it comes from... For me, it's an old style sherry malt from Scotland, and the fact that it's not "easy" makes me believe it's from Scotland rather than an accelerated maturation. Good old style oloroso at the nose, very winey, with plenty of dried plums and cherries. I would bet on a very old Macallan or Glendronach, from the style. Not too heavy, lively, full of rancio, tamarind and dried fruits. Mineral, firm, nervous. Textbook old sherry.

Sample #13 (Kavalan 2009/2017 'Solist' (58.60%, OB, C#S090306024, Sherry Cask, 461 Bts.)

This didn't taste anything like whisky to me, and then I discovered that it's another Kavalan, so again it explains the weird flavour profile. With a nose full of glue, cola and chinotto, it's rather like an old rum. At the palate it's deeply oaky, full darkly infused tea. Tannins galore but still playful. Heretical whisky, certainly not for purists, but very entertaining and flavourful.

Sample #41 (Kavalan 2009/2017 'Solist' (58.60%, OB, C#S090306031, Sherry Cask, 481 Bts.)

Say what you want about Kavalan, but this was a lovely whisky... provided you like sherry. With a bit nose of rhubarb, liquorice, cinchona, bitters, it's obviously a very big malt. At the palate it's winey, with notes of musty library and coffee. Of course it IS very tannic, with big oak extraction, and as we all know it's the result of accelerated maturation. Still, it's very lively, sweet and peppery, like an old Armagnac. Wood polish, chinotto, bergamot, coffee, old big sherry. To be fair, it has a slightly musty note which prevents from reaching higher scores. Shortly: it's heavy handed, but fun.

Sample #1 (Glengoyne 28yo 1998/2016 (51.1%, OB For Taiwan, C#835, First Fill European Oak Sherry Butt, 554 Bts.)

Lovely old sherry once again, from a distillery which rarely goes wrong. It's fruity but dry, and the winey character doesn't hide the distillate with its fruity notes of apples and oranges. Big dry sherry, very tannic and astringent: typically Scottish style, intense and spicy, and even leathery. Do I detect a hint of peat? Sure, why not, it might well be possible. For me Glengoyne really shines above 18 years of aging.

Sample #198 (Yamazaki 25yo (43%, OB, Sherry)

Not easy to evaluate this one! On first taste, I thought it had the typical nose of a whisky which has spent way too much time in oak, even to the point of finding it technically faulty: bitter oak, heavy herbal notes, a cardboard touch, and behind this heavy curtain some tropical fruits plus grapefruit. Same at the palate, with its big oak extraction and thick tannins, quite bitter and with notes of coffee, liquorice, and a hint of tropical fruit. My first comment was: *"OK for lovers of overly oaky old whiskies which have lost all hopes of maltiness and liveliness. As Indiana Jones would have said: "It belongs in a museum". For me, it's didactic but way downhill and borderline unenjoyable"*. But... I decided to give it a second chance, with a LOT of time and air. My suggestion: pour it, go outside, and return after 2 hours. You'll find it completely changed! It's

tannic, yes, but also very fruity. Lovely, orange marmalade, a hint of peat too. Not excessive at all, the bitterness and the oak have been lifted, and the curtains have been raised. Great old whisky.