

spirits



A DROP OF THE HARD STUFF

Drinks giant Diageo has set out to disprove the assumption that whisky is an old man's drink and has an image problem. Cue a series of live whisky tastings throughout the UK and a chance for club managers to fire up their members with some decent single malts. MATTHEW MOGGRIDGE knocks 'em back

Is whisky an old man's drink with an image problem? Well, yes and no. If I'm brutally honest, my main memories of whisky involve my father drinking his Johnnie Walker Red Label in the days before it was mysteriously withdrawn for the shelves of UK off licences. It's back now, but I can't look at the label without thinking of dad and his nightly 'whisky and water'. His father drank it before him and whenever, as a young child, I visited my grandparents over in Wandsworth - old clocks ticking and the smell or roast lamb cooking in the oven - out would come the whisky.

So, is whisky an old man's drink? Is it suffering from an image problem and is that image justified or not?

In short, it's not justified, but there is still good reason for Diageo to get a posse of 'ambassadors' together and ride off around the UK setting the record straight and providing whoever cares to listen with sound advice on the subject of single malts, their widely differing taste profiles, and where they come from.

And let's be fair, it's not just because whisky might be suffering from an image problem that Diageo has decided



Joel Harrison - his engaging style won over the audience

to hit the road. The company's intentions are honourable inasmuch as this consumer-facing initiative gives the man and woman in the street an opportunity to brush up on their knowledge of Scotch whisky and enjoy a few high-end single malts in the process.

Diageo's hired guns are Andy McConkey, Neil Ridley and Joel Harrison, three young guys with two things in common: one is music - Neil and Joel were A&R men for major record labels and Andy is a session musician - and

two is a mutual appreciation of decent whisky.

The plan is to target sporting or dining clubs and offer a light-hearted evening discussing and tasting four very different single malt whiskies and noting their distinct characteristics.

Stop one was London's Fox Club in Clarges Street, a swish venue in Mayfair with 300 individual and 10 corporate members. The club runs a variety of interactive events for its members, such as wine and Champagne tastings and even a 'Lara Croft' night featuring a motivational talk by Suzy Madge, a record-breaking ski mountaineer and adventurer, not forgetting a Fox & Vixen night.

Louise Comrie of T&LC Events and Fox Club manager Bethan Seaton work closely together on administering the events and were approached by Diageo to run the whisky tasting. Louise approached members and non-members in London with a view to them attending the event and the stage was set for a rainy Thursday night at the end of March.

Diageo has developed a 'flavour map' of Scotland that