

Ringwood's Richard Saunders – promoting localness and quality cask ale



# A LOCAL HERO



Located on the outskirts of the New Forest, Ringwood Brewery has a strong local following and some interesting beer brands that are available nationally. MATTHEW MOGGRIDGE talks to 'site ambassador' Richard Saunders

Marston's decision to retain a strong element of locality among the smaller regional brewers it has acquired, has enabled the breweries concerned to retain a strong element of independence in the eyes of the consumer; and this can only be a good thing when one considers that the real ale industry has come to rely increasingly on words like 'provenance' and 'locality' to sell beer.

Cask ale has always been a 'local' product even if modern logistics, wholesaling and deals with bigger companies have meant that smaller brewers, hidden away in the smallest of hamlets, miles from civilization, can enjoy 'national reach' just like their larger regional counterparts.

And so it is with Ringwood, a small regional brewer

based on the outskirts of the New Forest where beers such as Ringwood Best (3.8 per cent), Forty Niner (4.9 per cent), and Old Thumper (5.0 per cent) have all enjoyed success with locals and holidaymakers alike. Ringwood's Boondoggle (4.2 per cent) is now one of the brewer's permanent cask offerings and it will be available in bottles in September at a higher abv of 5 per cent, according to Richard Saunders, 'site ambassador' for Ringwood and a self-confessed real ale lover. There is also Ringwood Porter, a rich, dark beer with a 4.7 per cent abv.

Marston's acquired the Ringwood brewery in 2007, two years before Saunders joined the company as a business development manager, hot from four years on the sharp end as a publican.

When Marston's acquired the Wychwood brewery, eight

months after Saunders joined, he found himself working out of the Wychwood brewery and getting heavily involved in 'forging local connections' as an area sales manager. His strong retail management background (he worked for Debenhams for 14 years) made him well prepared for his site ambassador role, a title that doesn't really define the job, he said. Saunders acts as a kind of focal point for trade and consumers alike, defining and making sense of what goes on at Ringwood and interfacing with consumers too.

According to Saunders, Ringwood is a very service-driven company and that has a lot to do with the company's heritage as a brewery built on great beer and great service. "There was an element of fear when Marston's took over as people were scared that the focus would change," he said, but those fears were unfounded as the >