



ROYAL
QUEENSLAND
AWARDS
SHOWCASING AUSTRALIA'S BEST



MEDIA RELEASE

26 February 2026

Australia's top beer and spirits crowned

Recognising Australia's best beverages, a Brisbane-based brewery and a Sunshine Coast Distillery took out top honours at the 2026 Royal Queensland Distilled Spirits and Beer Awards supported by King Street and The Star Brisbane, at the Brisbane Showgrounds tonight.

In the Royal Queensland Awards (RQA) beer competition, Happy Valley Brewing Co in Stafford, Brisbane, claimed the coveted Grand Champion Beer supported by Lion award, for its 50K IPA.

Meanwhile in the distilled spirits competition, Nil Desperandum from Woombye on the Sunshine Coast took out the prestigious Grand Champion title for its Premier Rum.

RQA Beer Competition Co-Chief Judge Steve Henderson said the Grand Champion beer stood out immediately during judging.

"The 50K IPA was fresh and vibrant, and the aroma just absolutely punched you in the nose," he said.

"The flavour matched the aroma beautifully and it had good body and carbonation."

The beer competition, reinvigorated in 2019, attracted a record 704 entries this year – up more than 30 per cent on 2025.

"The entry numbers tell a really good story – the industry has had a tough couple of years and it's just starting to turn around again which is fantastic to see," Mr Henderson said.

Further reflecting the industry's resurgence, The Star Brisbane Emerging Queensland Brewer Award attracted such an impressive field this year that judges were forced to declare a tie for the first time, with Ben Kirby from Big Rock Brewing in Rockhampton and Jacob Viel from Blind Boy Brewing in Salisbury, Brisbane, sharing the title.

That depth of talent was reflected across the competition, with Mr Henderson describing the overall standard of entries as phenomenal, particularly in the new Mexican-style lager classes.

"Mexican-style lagers are becoming quite popular in the market and we saw a strong number of these entered that were exceptionally well made."

In the distilled spirits competition Nil Desperandum claimed five of the 10 trophies on offer. The distillery was also named Best Queensland Distillery, it also won the inaugural Champion Feature Rum/Cane Spirit Trophy for its Artfully Corrupted Spiced Rum plus The Star Brisbane Best Queensland Distilled Spirit for its Premier Rum.



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Distilled Spirits Competition Chief Judge Dave Withers said the Grand Champion Premier Rum was a clear standout.

“There was an elegance and poise about the rum. It showed real restraint, allowing the spirit to shine without being overwhelmed by too much oak,” he said.

“It was of exceptional quality, particularly in the way it appealed to a classic Caribbean style.”

Now in its third year, the spirits competition attracted almost 100 entries, with Mr Withers describing the overall quality as outstanding.

“When I first started judging distilled spirit competitions eight years ago, we certainly didn’t see the same level of diversity, boldness and experimentation that we’re seeing today.”

The prestigious Royal Queensland Awards recognise and celebrate Australia’s finest food and beverage products and the producers behind them across seven categories - distilled spirits, beer, wine, beef, lamb, dairy and ice cream.

For the full distilled spirits and beer results catalogues please visit www.rqa.com.au

2026 TROPHY WINNERS – BEER

GRAND CHAMPION BEER SUPPORTED BY LION (Australia’s best beer)

50K IPA Draught by Happy Valley Brewing Co

CHAMPION PALE ALE SUPPORTED BY BINTANI

Biere De Mer Draught by Madocke Beer Brewing Company

CHAMPION AMBER DARK ALE

Brown Ale Packaged by Wobbly Chook Brewing Co

CHAMPION PORTER-STOUT

Extra Extra Packaged by Soapbox Brewing Co

CHAMPION HYBRID BEER

Bourbon Barrel Aged Anniversary Ale VII Packaged by Slipstream Brewing Company

CHAMPION LAGER SUPPORTED BY BARRETT BURSTON

Alby Draught Draught by Gage Roads Brewing Co

CHAMPION INDIA PALE ALE SUPPORTED BY KEGSTAR

50K IPA Draught by Happy Valley Brewing Co

CHAMPION EUROPEAN-STYLE ALE

Classic Saison Packaged by Slipstream Brewing Company

CHAMPION SESSION BEER

Alby Crisp Draught by Gage Roads Brewing Co



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CHAMPION STRONG BEER

The Bay Double IPA Draught by Happy Valley Brewing Co

CHAMPION MIXED CULTURE BEER

Blackberry Sour Draught by Aether Brewing

CHAMPION GINGER BEER OF SHOW

The Ginger Trade Draught by Pacific Ocean Brewing

CHAMPION LOW / NON-ALCOHOLIC BEER

Yeah Buoy Packaged by Gage Roads Brewing Co

THE STAR BRISBANE BEST QUEENSLAND BEER OF SHOW

50K IPA Draught by Happy Valley Brewing Co

CHAMPION BEST NEW BREWERY

No Eye Deer Brewing

CHAMPION LARGE BREWERY SUPPORTED BY CRYER MALT

Gage Roads Brew Co

CHAMPION SMALL/MEDIUM BREWERY SUPPORTED BY HPA

No Eye Deer Brewing

CHAMPION BREWPUB

Happy Valley Brewing Co

BEST CONTRACT BREWER

27 South Brewing

THE STAR BRISBANE EMERGING QUEENSLAND BREWER

Joint recipients: Ben Kirby from Big Rock Brewing and Jacob Viel from Blind Boy Brewing

2026 TROPHY WINNERS – DISTILLED SPIRITS

GRAND CHAMPION DISTILLED SPIRIT (Australia's best distilled spirit)

Premier Rum by Nil Desperandum

CHAMPION VODKA

Davenport Vodka by Davenport Distillery

CHAMPION GIN

Imperial Dry Gin Blackwattle Distilling Co

CHAMPION RUM / CANE SPIRIT

Premier Rum by Nil Desperandum



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CHAMPION WHISKY

Country to Coast #6 by Fleurieu Distillery

CHAMPION ALTERNATIVE SPIRIT

Pear Packham by Schnapps Idea Distillery

CHAMPION FEATURE RUM / CANE SPIRIT

Nil Desperandum Artfully Corrupted Spiced Rum by Nil Desperandum

BEST EXPERIMENTAL RUM / CANE SPIRIT

Stormy Skies Cane Spirit by Milton Distillery

THE STAR BRISBANE BEST QUEENSLAND DISTILLED SPIRIT

Premier Rum by Nil Desperandum

BEST QUEENSLAND DISTILLERY

Nil Desperandum

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