

Insight/Personal Essay

How I Invented the Beer Gauge

By Christopher L. Holloway
Electronics Engineer, Electromagnetics Division

When your local pub says it is selling you a pint of beer, you should get a pint. Not 12 ounces or even 14 ounces, but 16 ounces. A pint is a standard U.S. measure of precisely 16 ounces of liquid. The question is: Are they selling you “a pint of beer,” or “a beer in a pint glass”? These are two distinctly different things.

I was tired of getting short poured at my favorite brew-pubs so in my spare time I developed the “Piaget Beer Gauge.” The majority of the volume in a standard U.S. pint glass is in the top third of the glass, and my measurement device indicates how much one is getting short poured. I have sold more than 35,000 beer gauges to individuals and companies. The companies order them as customized business cards. Proceeds from these sales are not making me rich, but they are keeping me in bike tires and beer.

Here’s my story:

After an unusually hard day at work, I stopped by the happy hour at my favorite brew-pub in town. Boulder has about 100,000 people and we have eight different brew-pubs to choose from. My favorite brewery had a Belgian-style ale and this heavenly nectar is only \$2 a pint during happy hour. I sat at the bar and ordered a pint. The bartender informed me that they had run out of the Belgian ale on tap. He indicated that he did have a few “bombers” remaining of the Belgian ale that he had bottled a while back, however. (A bomber bottle contains 22 ounces and a standard U.S. pint is 16 ounces. These technical points are key to the unfolding story.)

After the bartender informed me that they had no Belgian ale on tap, there were a few moments of silence, as I needed to collect my thoughts. As we know, beer from the tap is a different organism than that in the bottle, and I had just spent the entire afternoon at work thinking of the Belgian ambrosia flowing from the tap. Once I was able to speak again, I asked if I could get the

bomber at the happy-hour price. Recall that a pint costs \$2 during happy hour. We then had the following exchange:

Bartender: “No, but the bombers are only \$5.”

Me: “But it is happy hour, so can I get a break off the normal bomber price of \$5?”

Bartender (a quote): “\$5 is a good price. Besides, a bomber contains almost two pints.”

Me: “How do you figure that?”

Bartender (a quote): “When you pour beer from a bomber into two pint glasses, both are almost full.”

Me: “You’re joking, right?”

Bartender: “No, when you pour beer from a bomber into two pint glasses, both are almost full.”

Me: “You are confused about the volumes you are seeing. The taper in the pint glass makes it appear as if they are almost full”

Bartender: “You are confused. It’s an optical illusion.”

Me: “Do you really think that? A bomber contains 22 ounces, and two pints contain 32 ounces. A bomber is not even 1½ pints of beer. Thus, how can you make that statement?”

At this point I realized that some individuals had Piaget’s syndrome; that is, the height of the beer in the glass made more of a visual impact on them than the width of the glass (for details, click on “Who was Piaget” on www.thebeergauge.com). I became aware that bartenders around the country were experiencing Piaget’s syndrome and having issues with filling pint glasses. I then asked himself, “Are bartenders sloppy at pouring, or are they just trying to increase their profit margins?” I knew it was my duty to design and develop the next revolutionary breakthrough in science, the Beer Gauge.

To date, *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Houston Chronicle*, *The Oregonian*, and 17 other news organs have published articles on the Beer Gauge. I’ve also done two radio interviews and one TV interview about it. This is another great example of how “measurement standards” aid U.S. citizens.

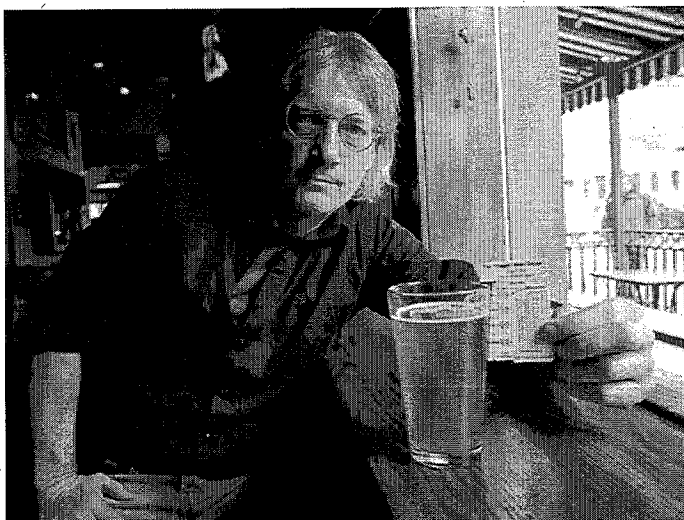
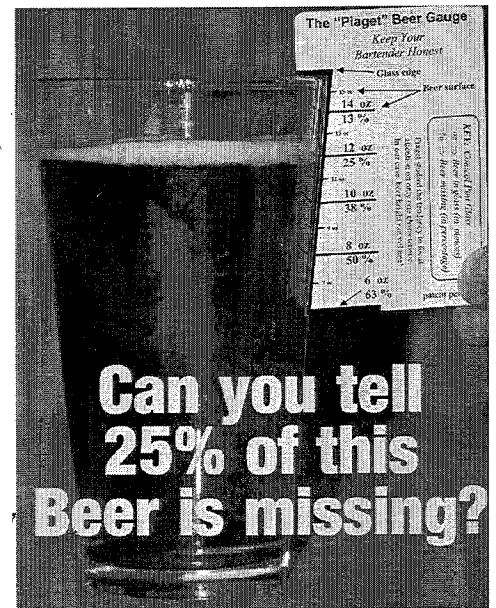


photo by Shawn Lortie

The author of this essay, his beer, and his gauge.