

#### The Matsui Single Malt Mizunara Cask nbc db (95)

n24 a saltier, seaweedy, coastal character to this than is normally found; then settles back into its unique Mizunara style with a charming fragility that emphasises both the effect of barley and oak working in tandem.

This is young whisky, make no mistake, but the sugars seem almost perfectly weighted, every bit as brittle as the barley as well as a lemon drop boiled candy character. Everything about this aroma, even the most delicate of phenol notes, seems to be set ready to collapse if not handled with care... just amazing...! t24 one barely needs to do anything here: the young distillate melts in the mouth and slowly the fresh barley dissolves over the taste buds: just so sexy and salivating. In slow motion those tart tannins notes begin to form and spread – truly one-off sensation deployed by the local oak. And with no greater haste the spices spread and intensify. It's as though choreographed...; f23 just more charm in slow motion, though the sugars are not quite as well represented. The tannins are clear and gentle the spices no more than an echo...; b24 I cannot emphasise enough the brilliance and bravery of this distillery. The Asian market puts a high price on dark whisky. Yet here is a unique malt: young, entirely naked with no caramel work to hide any fat or blemishes. This is as natural and purely Japanese as Onsen. Except this is to be taken without water... 48% nc ncf

#### The Matsui Single Malt The Peated nbc db (89.5)

n22 a degree of sharpness suggests young, as does the pungency of the phenols which possesses an attractive smoked bacon character; t23 again, youth is the over-riding sensation on delivery. Then a burst of malt before the smoky covering comes down. The sugars are eye-watering, as is the barley: a curious cross between smoked barley sugar and lemon drops; f22 a little smoked cocoa amid the spice and light bitterness; b22.5 a typically idiosyncratic style of peating from this distillery, though the smoke often battles with the sugars as well as the tannin. Not quite as well balanced and rewarding as their extraordinary Sakura and Mizunara cask bottlings. Incidentally, I have just spent half an hour playing around with vatting the three styles together using instinct as my guiding light: some of the results were spectacular... 48% nc ncf

#### The Matsui Single Malt Sakura Cask nbc db (95.5)

n23.5 freshly peeled grapefruit blends effortlessly with vanilla-led oak. A young malty character keeps an aloof distance. The sugars are a subtle mix of grist and icing sugar. Is it the cherry wood giving delicate phenolic note...? t24.5 the surprising oiliness works wonders in holding together and then extending the complexity. You half fancy that there is a light phenol note on the loose here. And you are convinced that there is barley concentrate at work. Also you are pretty sure the sugars range from delicate muscovado to thin orange-blossom honey. But there are no statements. Just teasing hints and whispers...; f23.5 those brilliant oils just keep on going. And the spices rise like the moon and glows above all. The fade is one of a tannin-barley combination; b24 forget about

discreet sips. Take healthy mouthfuls and chew and allow the splendour of the complexity, complete with those mysterious hints of phenol, to unravel on your tantalised taste buds. So gentle. So genteel... Yet so understatedly enormous...yet so sprightly. A treat and a paradox of a whisky. 48%  
nc ncf

The Kurayoshi Pure Malt Whisky nbc (86) n21 t21.5 f21.5 b22

If you like your whisky young, here's your dram. The toffee notes don't quite allow the flavours to develop as they might, but the intermittent surge of barley and spice ensures there is still much to enjoy. 43% ncf

The Kurayoshi Pure Malt Whisky Aged 8 Years nbc (87.5) n21.5 t22.5 f21.5 b22

Massively malty and tender on the palate. But a little too much toffee interferes with the more delicate tones. The weight of the spices are superb, though. Just a shame about the relative flatness of both the nose and finish. 43% ncf

The Kurayoshi Pure Malt Whisky Aged 12 Years nbc (89.5)

n22 good bourbon cask lead but slightly over toffee reliant...; t22.5 ridiculously soft and supine. The toffee and muscovado sugars gang together but allow the barley to pass unhindered. Spices grows with the confidence of the malt itself; f22 toasty, even a hint of burnt raisin; b23 thick and endearing malt. The spices play a clever game. 43% ncf

The Kurayoshi Pure Malt Whisky Aged 18 Years nbc (95.5)

n23.5 such a delicate nose: rice paper infused with the lightest heather-honey and the most apologetic nuance of smoke...; t24 just brilliant...! Though the heather-honey is little more than a coded message on the nose, it arrives on the palate like an Emperor upon a throne. And although salivating, there is a depth beyond the simple broadcast of sugar and grist. Sugars are extracted from the tannins, also and these have a spicy hue. This is all about layering and subtlety, and it is hard to imagine that they could have got it better than this...; f24 the spices buzz on. A little cocoa bitterness now as the honey tones have receded. A little molasses compensates excellently; b24 a malt which celebrates its great age in style and considerable complexity. Indeed, so complex, each mouthful brings you a little stand and nuance you are sure wasn't there before. Definitely knocking on the door as Japanese Whisky of the Year. 50% ncf

The Kurayoshi Pure Malt Whisky Sherry Cask nbc (90.5)

n22 a plodding nose, but safe and secure with light grape and toffee on nodding terms; t23 very young barley and toffee hold court until spice and dried plums notes begin to find their home; f22.5 an unusual finale with an intense dryness at odds with the chest-beating muscovado sugars; b23 chewy and sticky, the youthfulness of this vatted malt is overcome by the intensity and richness of the malt and dark sugars. A complex, pleasing experience. 43% ncf

The San-In Blended Japanese Whisky nbc (89)

n22 big emphasis on grain. But the molten muscovado sugars work well with the custard powder...; t23 silky and fat, those sugars on the nose shine wonderfully once they hit the palate. There is a surprising surge of warming spice and a slow build of vanilla; f21.5 tends slightly towards the dry and mildly bitter side, though the spice glow delightfully; b22.5 a silky, grain-rich blend which is quite beautifully-made and shows its sugar-spice charms to its fullest extent. 40%

The San-In Blended Japanese Whisky ex-Bourbon Barrel nbc (94.5)

n23.5 Japan goes to Kentucky: the liquorice and tannin would be recognised and appreciated by distillers east of the Blue Ridge Mountains...; t24 for a blend, the mouth-feel is lush and lingering. The Kentucky-style tannins arrive early and then we are thrown into series of intense “Love Hearts” candy notes – the purple ones in particular. There is a fizzing liveliness to the sugars, but the blend of black and red liquorice really tops the bill...; f23 massive tannin. A little sweetened hickory just to round it off; b24 this is truly magnificent. The label promises fruit that doesn’t arrive. But it doesn’t need it. It’s a show-stopper in its own right. 43%

The Tottori Blended Japanese Whisky nbc (91.5)

n23 the grains preen and shew off their clarity and versatility; the tannins refuse to either confront or dominate; the sugars stick to a low-key lemon zestiness...Young, green...and deeply attractive; t23 the grains deployed by Matsui really do have outstandingly beautiful weight and the vital ability to allow the malts to have their say. The sharpness of the barley ensures the salivation levels are high; f22.5 delicate vanillas and spice; b23 elegant, light, and sophisticated, this blend would be the perfect welcome home moment for when we are finally able to return from a day in the office... 43%

The Tottori Blended Japanese Whisky aged in bourbon barrel, nbc (89.5)

n22.5 the tannins buzz with a Kentucky burr... Astonishingly and intriguingly, there is also a theme of every soft drink in the State other than Ale 8...; t23 big, fat and maxes out on the chocolate and liquorice lead. The spices are lazy and instead make way for a buttery sub-plot...; f22 a very curious fade of sarsaparilla and root beer mix. The chocolate holds its ground; b22 well, it certainly goes Kentucky, but for the finish not in the way you'd expect. That said...what a great entertainer this whisky is... 43%