

Gin Gents



AVIATION GIN

March 6, 2015

Brand: Aviation Gin

Style: American

**Distillery: House Spirits Distillery, 2025 SE 7th Ave, Portland, OR
ALC: 42% 84 Proof**

Average US Retail Price: \$30-35 / 750mL

Website: <http://aviationgin.com>

Jim's Review

Named for a cocktail created nearly 100 years before “taking off” in 2006, Aviation Gin “found its wings” in the new American interest in craft distilling that became the rage over the last decade. Timing was on their side.

The name alone evokes the romance, glamour and style of the early age of flight. These days, airline transportation for the masses has largely lost all of that, but the image is strong in our mythos and remains an attractive, seductive national memory.



Photo by Jim Trotman On a crisp October day in 2008, I was loading some gear into my car and looked up to see two aircraft approaching each other from opposite directions. I tend to keep my main camera fitted with a 70-200mm lens. I just reached for it, pointed it skyward and made the background image as they were nearing each other. I filed it away, knowing I had no immediate use but it was sharp enough and interesting enough to hold onto. For my birthday one year, Cathie and T-Mike Morrison, friends and neighbors we share with Russ and his wife, gave me a set of cocktail glasses, one of which you see here. Cathie's father Jerry Bellmer was an actual Cold War F-86 Sabre Jet pilot in the 50s and 60s. These are my favorite cocktail glasses. On tasting Aviation, these elements all came together.

Or one may also conjure up the image of an airport bar, just before closing. Down at the end an exhausted pilot takes a seat, looking a little worse for the wear from fighting headwinds and dodging thunderstorms all the way from Pittsburg to Chicago. He has just brought his DC-9 home in the nick of time before fog and low ceilings closed the airport to all other inbound flights. All souls who were aboard are safe, and either heading to their homes or their hotels. All he wants is a dry place to sit and gin in his hand.

It may be nostalgia, it may be that remake of "The Great Gatsby" or it may just be the taste, but Aviation Gin, this Northwestern regional crafted spirit, hit cruising speed right out of the gate.

Hey, it works for me.

I first learned of Aviation Gin by way of an iPhone pic my brother snapped and sent me. He'd seen it at a Dallas Liquor store and knowing of my own past as a pilot knew I'd get a kick out of it..

So then Russ and I got this little enterprise going and in his travels he managed to acquire a bottle or two. It was time to get our review hat on for this one.

And so we tasted.

The first thing I noticed was this was no docile pet. A LOT was happening, wit the juniper element happily present but right up along side was more spice than herb.

Aviation hits the tongue energetically.

A pepper like note, somewhere between parsley and peppercorns highlights the warmth of the alcohol bite.

When I tried to speak after tasting, and on the audio it is evident, my voice was hilariously altered a good octave higher than normal. That is one hell of a handshake.

In martinis, with more traditional and milder gins, the taste buds can get saturated with the juniper notes after a couple of drinks and one can be fooled that he or she may not be playing with a full strength sample. I do not see that being the case with Aviation. It is so tenacious that there will be no false assumptions.

Yeah, sure, we made jokes about it being as subtle as Genghis Kahn, Jet A fuel, and carbon footprints, but this really is just a very tasty, probably highly mixable gin with backbone.

We should mention we sampled this just after giving No. 209 a spin. The No. 209 is steady, mild and as gentle a gin as you may find. Aviation is also steady, but not subtle at all. Both were delicious but the contrast was significant.

Aviation defines their taste profile as a “botanical democracy.” A term Russ and I got a kick out of. Not a social flora democracy, not an herbaceous communism but a botanical democracy which they list on the Aviation Gin site as juniper, Elletaria cardamom, lavender, sarsaparilla, coriander, anise and dried sweet orange peel.

I suspect the coriander and sarsaparilla were the pepper like component with the lavender adding a sooth, mollifying effect. If this gin were music, the lavender would be the backing baritone saxophone playing off the higher melodies of the citrus, anise juniper. In the case of Uncle Val’s, the florals were like a whole sax section.

This is an outstanding American style gin that is fine as a martini and has the will to stand on its own in a mix. As soon as I can get my hands on some Crème De Violette and some Marachino Liqueur,

I'll have to whip up an Aviation Gin's namesake cocktail for a test flight. That is providing Aviation Gin can be found somewhere in the hangar.

Bravo Zulu, Aviation.

Russ's Review

Aviation, like No. 209, is another new American gin that has begun to break out into the national market.

It is widely distributed across the country and is available in many liquor stores and increasingly, bars.

On the nose there is the usual heavy alcohol presence with a hint of juniper and spice.

Drinking it straight and warm—our patented “naked” tasting routine, revealed a circus of flavors, or as I described it—a palate party.

On the rocks, heat was still present, but much reduced.



From Aviation Gin website

One could debate if Aviation qualifies as a traditional gin with the requisite juniper forward profile, but I'm coming down on the side of Aviation firmly belonging in the gin camp.

It's not as smooth as No. 209. Rather it's a muscular gin with a ton of flavors competing for attention.

As a martini it will put a little hair on the chest—again, quite different from the No. 209 experience, but its power is not a flaw, it's a major plus.

At the finish I sensed a botanical that was flattening the juniper taste and taking some of that entry muscularity down a notch or two, which worked. In other words, a nice finish—more of a soft landing after a strong entry.

But it won't sneak up on you, and as Jim noted, martini drinkers won't suffer from "pine tree" fatigue if you choose to drink more than a couple at one sitting.

And a hint of spices as well as some citrus was playfully making the rounds in my mouth in the "rocks" mode.

This is the type of complexity that tasters love.

Whether it is coffee, whiskey, beer, and especially wine—differing sensations from the nose to palate entry to finish, and everything in between is generally a good thing. And if done correctly, a sign of quality and attention to detail.

Complexity done right makes for a unique product.

As it turns out one of the botanicals in the mix is lavender. However unlike Uncle Val's Botanical Gin, which was lavender heavy—Aviation's use of lavender takes some of the edge off of this heavier-handed gin.

We taped our tasting for this one and reviewing that video we kept returning to the theme that Aviation is no wallflower.

One observation I made was if compared to wine varietals, No. 209 is a Pinot Noir, whereas Aviation would be on a scale with Cabernet Sauvignon or a hearty Zinfandel.

Veering into a dance analogy, No. 209 is a like a waltz—light and fluid.

Aviation is the action dancing down in the mosh pit—organized but wild and free-wheeling at the same time.

Another botanical, sarsaparilla as revealed by the distillers web site probably explains a lot of that muscular tasting experience—adding the zing provided by licorice or wintergreen without actually tasting like root beer or medicinal attributes often used to describe sarsaparilla.

Also present is coriander, which adds a citrus and spicy component, cardamom and anise, and finally, orange peel.

Put it all together and one can easily figure out why our first reaction on the video tasting was: “Wow, there is a lot going on here.”

As a gin and tonic Aviation took on an entirely different profile—all of these botanicals work to make a gin and tonic where the gin can stand up to the tonic and deliver a powerful, but flavorful punch.

In essence, Aviation is not going to be denied its flavor profile when mixed with tonic and even a squirt of lime.

Instead, it asserts itself and actually delivers a G&T that does not taste run-of-the-mill.

If you regularly order G&T's in bars where Bombay or Tanqueray is most often used, you will notice right away Aviation is something different.

The gin has won tons of awards in competitions and has been rated extremely high in most wine and spirits magazines.

And for myself, this is the first American-style gin that I've tasted that successfully pulls away from juniper-forward and creates something that is still a gin, but] completely different and quite good.

I rank it four olives, or four shot glasses, but also award Aviation an American flag cluster for successfully breaking the mold without crossing the line into the world of flavored vodkas-American style gin that gets it right!